

# **THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REPRODUCTION**

**MOTHERHOOD, WORK AND THE HOME  
IN NEOLIBERAL BRITAIN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Political Economy Of Reproduction: Motherhood, Work And The Home In Neoliberal Britain**

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This thesis investigates how the processes and practices of reproduction have been transformed not only by the ascendant political rationality of neoliberalism but also by women's struggles that have reconfigured motherhood, the domestic home and the gendered organisation of employment. Through exploring both the 1970s feminist demand for "free 24-hour nurseries" and the contemporary provision of extended, overnight and flexible childcare, care that is often referred to as "24-hour childcare", the research contributes to feminist understandings of the gendered and racialised class dynamics inside and outside the home and the wage. The research repositions the 'Woman Question' as, yet again unavoidable and necessary for comprehending and intervening in the brutalising consequences of capitalist accumulation.

Situated within the Marxist feminist tradition, the work of reproduction is understood as a cluster of tasks, affective relations and employment that have historically been constructed and experienced as 'women's work'. The interrelation between the subjectivity of motherhood and the political economy of reproduction is analysed through a feminist genealogy of 24-hour childcare in Britain. Using ethnographic encounters, archival research and interview data with mothers and childcare workers, the research tells a story about the women who have worked both inside and outside the home, raised children, cooked and cleaned, and who, both historically and in the present, continue to create an immense amount of wealth and value.

As women's labour market participation has steadily increased over the last 40 years, the discourse of reproduction has shifted to one in which motherhood is increasingly constructed as a choice. Within neoliberal discourse the decision to have a child is constructed as a private matter for which individuals bear the costs and responsibility. The thesis argues that, as a result of motherhood being constructed more and more as something that is chosen, the spaces of resistance and opposition towards motherhood have been limited and resistance has been individuated and privatised.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
ECEC	early childhood education and care
IVF	In vitro fertilisation
NCS	National Childcare Strategy
NJACCWER	National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights
NHS	National Health Service
ONS	Office of National Statistics
OWAAD	Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement
WERS	Workplace Employment Relations Survey
WWCC	Working Women's Charter Campaign

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*This thesis is dedicated to  
Silvia Federici*

*We are the granddaughters and great-granddaughters  
of the witches they could not burn*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Managing Motherhood in the Neoliberal Era

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#### 1.1 Joy: Encounter #1

One of the first things I noticed was her amazing vegetable garden, in full summer bloom with neat rows of corn, lush greens and tomatoes. I was sitting in the living room of Joy's house with her granddaughter playing at my feet, and her daughter cooking ox-tail soup in the kitchen. Joy was born in 1956 and arrived in London when she "had just turned eight". She had travelled from Jamaica and remembers being sick for most of the six-week boat journey. Arriving in April 1963, Joy docked at Southampton and "got a real shock". Not only was it really cold but, also, Joy learnt that the people she thought were her mother and father "were not my parents – they were my maternal aunt and uncle. They didn't have any children so I was the only one". She had lived with her aunt and uncle since she was nine months old. This discovery left her "in a daze for about four years". She was sent to Britain to live with her biological family and, in doing, so went from being an only child in Jamaica to living in a large and noisy household in northwest London.

Living in a large family, "was a shock. I wasn't used to all the backstabbing, pecking order and lies: I was number three". Some years earlier, her parents had made the journey to Britain separately from each other. Before settling in Britain her father had travelled around the world. When he arrived in Britain, "my mum came to join him". Joy's parents' story is one shared by many who travelled from the former colonies to the Mother Country – whether in search of a better education for their kids, in search of work or because of promises made.

In 1957, a year after Joy was born, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan declared: "Most of our people have never had it so good." The decades preceding the 1950s had been marked by profound suffering, from the mass hunger and unemployment of the 1930s, to the hundreds of thousands of lives lost during the Second World War and the sacrifices in the name of reconstruction that continued long after the war had ended. After years of suffering, living standards for many working-class and middle-class families had finally started to rise. For many people in Britain, the post-war years delivered: a universal health system; running hot water; WC's inside council houses; wage increases, and most notably, things – lots and lots of things to buy, to consume, to want and to have. In the same speech, Macmillan said: "The pattern of the Commonwealth is changing and with it is changing Britain's position as the Mother Country. Our children are growing up."

In 1963, the year Joy arrived in Britain, many women in Britain, most of them white, were at home with the baby. These mothers were part of a generation of women who could afford, often for the first time, to be 'just a housewife'. Being exclusively at home with the children brought with it new pressures and sources of anxiety: their worry and anxiety fuelled by their isolation and the intensive mode of mothering made popular by post-war developments in psychology. The newly-established welfare state and the male family wage supported – or nearly supported – the post-war imaginary of separate spheres of male work and female care.

In London in the 1960s, Joy's mother worked three jobs. Joy recalls that her mother "worked very hard: she used to sew for a company that used to do jam – the one that had the golliwogs on the label – and she had two cleaning jobs at night". Neither Joy nor her brothers and sisters were ever in formal childcare, as her mother worked from home during the day and "then went out cleaning in the evening". Her father worked shift-work – mostly nights for various packing companies.

Joy left school at 16 with no formal qualifications. No one had picked up on her dyslexia. She explains: "The school system back then was a bit prejudiced, dare I say. So they didn't pick up on it". Joy started working in school catering after she left school. "I had a skill that was natural, which was catering so my careers officer said, why don't you try catering?" Her first child, a boy, was born in 1972 soon after she left school. Over the next 20 years she worked in school catering and had four more children. Her last child was born in 1981. The hours and holidays of school catering suited the rhythms of motherhood. Over this period, the local authorities ran school catering. Joy's work involved cooking school dinners, and she took pride in producing food that the kids would eat and that was good for them. She remembers taking the time to make sure there were different coloured vegetables on the plate: "You got the carrots, which is lovely, vibrant. Peas, vibrant. And you put them together and they, you know, pop!" She left that job in the late 1980s when school catering contracted out to a private company. She left because she lost control over what food she could put on the plate: "There is nothing wrong with chips, but not every day." In Joy's view, "when the council provided the meals, the meals were better".

In 1998 Joy got a job driving buses for London Transport. "When the government radicalised the school meal provision system, I decided to leave and do something completely different – I drove buses for a number of years." It was another decent job that had small pleasures, like driving the Routemaster buses. It was a little unusual for women to be drivers but not so unusual for drivers to be black. Joy stopped driving buses in 2002 when the bus lines were finally all broken up, sold off and contracted out to private companies. The new private company wanted her to work more hours for less pay.

In 2004 Joy returned to catering and joined the growing childcare sector, this time in a private nursery. She recalls: "It was a Montessori nursery and

was quite nice". Elected in 1997, the New Labour Government abandoned the long-held idea that mothers' employment was harmful to children. The worry of maternal deprivation caused by working mothers being away from their children had lingered since the 1950s. However, by the late 1990s, government policy actively promoted the 'adult worker model family', and introduced the *National Childcare Strategy*. Change was in the air: early years care and education were now a matter for the attention of the state. At the same time, ideas were shifting about the desirability of maternal employment. A partnership between the family and central government was established, one that promoted maternal employment, focusing especially on single mothers. Economic growth in twenty-first century Britain was to be built on the backs of working mothers.

In 2011, at the age of 55, Joy registered as a childminder. "I have always, sort of, touched on caring for people whether old or young." Joy is now one of the growing army of self-employed workers in Britain. This employment status means she manages her own time, takes fewer holidays and bears all the risk when parents move on or fail to pay. In 2014, Joy signed up to Brent Council's childminder scheme to provide flexible '24-hour' childcare. "I think it is a good idea, because of how parents are working nowadays. It is not a 9-5; things have changed tremendously." Before the scheme was introduced in 2014, Joy was already providing extended-hours childcare, often working from 7am until 10pm because parents had begged her for extended hours. "Sometimes from 6.30am. But what I do is ask parents, 'please, please phone and if I am still in my night clothing, don't be alarmed'".

She knows that much of the economy is now operating on a 24-hour basis, particularly the care industry: "Some parents they work as carers and in care homes and their shifts are very funny and peculiar." In lots of ways, Joy likes the extended-hours services: "This is one of the reasons I try and help out: the 24-hour services I appreciate it, so you roll with the times." But she



knows that such services come at a cost, especially “in a climate when the government wants everyone to go to work”. Joy is a grandmother now and looks after her granddaughter. Her daughter works as carer and has irregular shift hours.

Joy had planned on retiring when she reached the age of 60. If the government had not increased the retirement age to 67, she would have been retiring in 2016. She had been looking forward to it after 43 years of work. “You know, you're looking forward, you have your plans and, all of a sudden, they say ‘oh, if you are going to be 60 next year you have to work another seven years before you can retire’.” She jokes that soon “they wont let anyone retire”.

## **1.2 Managing Motherhood**

This thesis tells a story about mothers like Joy — women who have worked both inside and outside the home, raised children, cooked and cleaned and who have created, and continue to create, an immense amount of wealth and value — although their work is rarely acknowledged in such a manner. The thesis examines how the waged and unwaged work of reproduction was reorganised during the post-war years and focuses on the restructuring of reproductive work in the last 40 years as a result of neoliberalism and feminism. The research is concerned with the labour of reproduction: a cluster of tasks, affective relations and employment that have historically been constructed and experienced as ‘women’s work’. The interrelation between the subjectivity of motherhood and the political economy of reproduction is analysed through a feminist genealogy of 24-hour childcare in Britain: a method of investigation that allows for a critical analysis of how gendered bodies and modes of being are produced and constituted culturally.

The research begins with an investigation of the current provision of extended and overnight childcare in Britain; care that is often referred to in the media as “24-hour childcare” (Williams 2014). Two different instances of 24-hour childcare are examined — a private nursery in Purley in south London, and a

local council-run childminder scheme in the northwest London borough of Brent. The current provision of 24-hour childcare is considered within the context of the dramatic increase in women's labour market participation over the last 40 years. In this research, women's increased labour market participation is situated within two contexts: feminist demands for women's economic, social and legal autonomy and the ascendance of the political rationality of neoliberalism that has produced the necessity for dual income households and the mobilisation of female labour-power on a global scale.

One of the central themes of the research is the subjectivity of motherhood, by which I mean the production of the ideas, beliefs, perceptions and tastes that constitute motherhood. The term subjectivity has its roots in French philosophy, particularly the structural Marxism of Louis Althusser, and in the Nietzschean-influenced philosophy of Michel Foucault (Burkitt 2008). According to Foucault, subjectivity possesses a dual meaning; to be both "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to [our] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault 1982:212). Ian Burkitt (2008) outlines Foucault's conceptualisation of subjectivity as strengthened, on the one hand, by being squarely within relations of power, yet weakened by being defined *a priori* in terms of domination.

Jason Read (2003) outlines a connected tension in the differing ways Marx and Foucault utilise the concept of subjectivity:

With Marx, subjectivity - living labour power - is immanent to the structure - capital - which it produces: while for Foucault, subjectivity - the specific historically constituted subjectivity - is immanent to the structures - the relations of knowledge and power - that produce it (Read 2003:90).

Read makes the point that what initially appear as sharp divergences between Marx and Foucault can be rephrased as a series of questions and problems, especially in light of the argument that we need to understand people "not only as the subjects of control and dependence, but as selves that emerge from the *intercorporeal* and intersubjective world of interactions and *mutual interdependence*" (Burkitt 2008:237, emphasis in the original). The examination of the subjectivity of motherhood as developed throughout this thesis shifts in focus from institutional apparatuses of power (the school, the childcare centre and workplace) to also include the behaviours and experiences of the everyday in places such as the home, the street or the playground.

The thesis examines the historical and strategic role that motherhood has had, and continues to play, within regimes of capitalist accumulation. The subjectivity of neoliberal motherhood is contextualised in relation to multiple elements including the fact that maternal employment has increased relative to the overall increases in women's labour market participation (ONS 2013b). Despite considerable changes to the organisation of women's employment, the work of raising and caring for children — work that also involves the reproduction of labour-power; continues to be organised by the discourse of motherhood. Indeed, research confirms that even in the instances where both parents are now in waged work, women continue to bear the main responsibility for arranging and ensuring the care of children — care that, when it is redistributed, is performed overwhelmingly by other women (Vincent and Ball 2006). As women's labour market participation has steadily increased over the last 40 years, the discourse of reproduction has shifted to one in which motherhood is increasingly constructed as a choice. Within neoliberal discourses of motherhood, the decision to have a child is produced as a private matter for which individuals bear the costs and responsibility. The thesis argues that, as a result of motherhood being constructed more and more as something that is chosen, the spaces of resistance and opposition towards motherhood have been limited and resistance has been individuated and privatised.

I offer an account of how the gendered work of reproductive labour functions under neoliberalism and how the subjectivity of motherhood is a contingent outcome of capitalist development and the direct result of government intervention. The multiple and, at times, contradictory experiences and knowledge that emerge from the struggles of feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist movements reveal that, within societies dominated and organised by the social relations of capitalism, what gets counted as work, who is considered a worker and, conversely, who is considered a mother have profound and, at times, violent ramifications. These ramifications are not limited to the sphere of waged work or even that of unwaged domestic work but, rather, have implications more generally for the way in which capitalism, the state and power are perceived to operate and function.

The research starts from the knowledge that every mode of production is a mode of subjectification (Read 2003) and that what an economic regime does; how it functions — is that it produces specific, one could say *particular* subjects. In other words, it is through the production and reproduction of particular subjects that the economic system of capitalism is produced. This thesis argues that, through the production of particular subjectivities of motherhood, particular families are created, particular childhoods are experienced, particular types of consumption occur, particular wage structures are dominant and particular types of political subjects are produced.

In so far as every mode of production is a mode of subjectification; one that can usefully be understood as producing particular mothers, it is also necessary to stress that the apparatus of motherhood is unstable, in that both the elements that organise and arrange motherhood and motherhood itself have undergone considerable change throughout the development of capitalism. Not only has motherhood changed, it is also always contested and, as this thesis outlines, often in crisis. The conflicts, tensions and battles that have been fought in the name of motherhood: for abortion rights and campaigns against forced sterilisation; for access to reproductive technologies; for the state provision of childcare, maternity leave and employment rights for pregnant women; or the requirement for single mothers to participate in workfare programs, reveals that motherhood is a highly contested terrain - indeed it has always been so.

### **1.3 Capitalism as Separation**

This research articulates a Marxist feminist account of labour, focusing primarily on the cluster of labour that is defined as reproductive. The account of reproductive labour is developed in conversation with a Foucauldian conceptualisation of the state and regimes of power. Following Foucault's analysis in *Mesh of Power*, the multiple sites of labour that are examined in this thesis are understood to be an "archipelago of different powers" (Foucault 2012:5). The investigation of how reproductive labour functions under capitalism draws on a Marxist feminist conceptualisation of capitalist

development as a series of interlocking and contingent separations in which the separation of production from reproduction is posited as foundational in the emergence and maintenance of capitalist social relations (Federici 2012, Mies 1998, Dalla Costa 1995, Dalla Costa and James 1975). Following Marxist feminist theory, I argue that it is this separation — of production from reproduction — that is necessary to maintain capitalist social relations and for the reproduction of labour-power. The separation of reproduction from production can also be mapped onto the different categories of productive and reproductive labour, even though both forms of labour operate through and across the separation. In a similar way, the separation of production and reproduction can also be mapped onto the separate spheres of the private and the public, although, again, the process is uneven and complex (Davidoff and Hall 1987).

The development and expansion of the capitalist system as one that “lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (Marx 1976[1867]:342) can be usefully understood as an historical, as well as a continuous, process of separation and differentiation (De Angelis 2001, 2004, Bonefeld 2001). Werner Bonefeld articulates this separation as present in the historical processes from which capital was born and constitutive in the foundation of a certain mode of labour; “a labor divorced from the soil, its means of subsistence, product, and existence; a labor separated from its object, its results, and its conditions of social being” (2011:381). Of relevance to this thesis is the Marxist argument that the social, economic and political relations of capitalism presuppose a separation of production from reproduction. This separation of production from reproduction is articulated, in the first instance, by workers’ dependence on the wage relation and their inability to reproduce themselves independently of capitalism. From a Marxist feminist perspective, while the waged relation produces a relation of dependency that disciplines and transforms those who receive a wage, it also organises and disciplines those who do not directly receive wages (Dalla Costa and James 1975).

In *Capital Vol. 1* (1867), Marx argues that the fundamental separation that was both necessary for and, once established, is then produced by capitalism on an ever-increasing scale, is “a complete separation between the workers and

the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour” (Marx 1976[1867]:874). Understood as a process of separation “which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his [*sic*]<sup>1</sup> own labour; it is a process which operates as two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers” (Marx 1976[1867]:874). Drawing on a Marxist feminist account of labour (Federici 2004, 2012, Mies 1998, Dalla Costa 1995), this thesis develops and expands the argument that the separation of production from reproduction is one of the central dynamics of capitalism. In addition, it also explores the dynamics in which capitalism seeks to draw previously non-commodified forms of reproductive labour into production, to make reproductive work more productive of profit.

Marx’s analysis of the economic and social restructuring that occurred in Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries posits that, while capitalism could not have developed without a prior and ongoing concentration of capital and labour made possible through colonialism, slavery and the enclosure of the commons, it is the violent and systematic separation of workers from the means of subsistence and production that provides the historical ‘secret’ of capitalist wealth.

While terminologies like separation and differentiation are effective as analytical categories to better understand the dynamics and relations of capitalism, they do not necessarily encapsulate the violence, the brutality, or the struggles, co-option and resistance embedded in the processes that separated producers from the social means of subsistence and of production. Marx reminds us that “this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire” (1976[1867]:875). Just in case one was to miss it the first time, he repeats the imagery 50 pages

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<sup>1</sup> Marx’s frequent presentation of the waged worker as male (he, his, men) has significant theoretical ramifications, in particular in relation to who is considered a worker and what counts as work. The assumption that the worker is always-already male is a problematic one, and powerfully illustrates the ways that gender constructs meaning, especially considering that in many chapters of *Capital Vol. 1* the examples of workers that Marx draws from are, in fact, women and children. Marxist feminists have argued that despite Marx’s relative silence on issue, the value calculus of labour-power necessarily includes the unwaged work of the ‘non-working’ housewife (Dalla Costa and James 1972, Fortunati 1995). So as not to burden the text I will forgo highlighting each instance but wish to continue to draw attention to the problematic assumptions that are embedded in such gendered constructions of work and worker.

later, stating that capital comes into the world “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (Marx 1976[1867]:926). Silvia Federici makes the point in her analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism that the term transition “suggests a gradual, linear historical development, whereas the period it names was among the bloodiest and most discontinuous in world history — one that saw apocalyptic transformations” (2004:62). Significant transformations occurred in Britain starting in the sixteenth century, to the organisation of the feudal household and feudal families. With land enclosures and the development of the factory system, significant amounts of production were moved out of the feudal house and gender relations were transformed. In addition, there were attempts to control women’s fertility, through the criminalisation of witchcraft, abortion and infanticide (Federici 2004).

The Marxist feminist analysis of capitalism as a series of interlocking and contingent separations posits that, under capitalism, reproductive work possesses both contradictions and a dual characteristic. Federici explains the duality of reproduction as, on the one hand, emerging from the fact that directly or indirectly reproductive labour is exchanged for a wage and is “at all points, subject to the conditions imposed on it by the capitalist organization of work and relations of production” (Federici 2012:99). In other words, “housework is not a free activity” (Federici 2012:99) and the historical organisation of reproductive labour is neither ‘natural’ nor universal. A series of examples that demonstrate the multiple ways of making and eating breakfast help to unpack a little further what is meant by the idea that there is nothing natural or universal about how reproductive labour is organised. The followings six scenarios, obviously idealised but evocative, are all intentionally framed with the male worker as the focus. In addition, they open up the intersection of class, race and gender relations, as well as alternative divisions of labour that are present within the reproductive sphere.

\* Man rises at 7am, leaves home for work, stops in a café *en route*, where a young female waitress serves him breakfast prepared by a migrant cook/chef.

\* Man rises at 7am, leaves home for work, stops in one of those garages-with-mini-mart en route, where he heats up a sandwich (produced off-site) in the microwave provided and pays the female cashier.

\* Man rises at 7am. His wife, who has risen at 6.45am, prepares him breakfast and does the washing up once he has left for work.

\* Man rises at 7am. His domestic servant, who has risen at 5.30am and travelled to work, prepares him breakfast (and does the washing up once he has left for work); she, the servant, also prepares breakfast for the man's girlfriend.

\* Man rises at 8am. He prepares breakfast for himself and his boyfriend (and does the washing up); he then leaves the house to play football in an amateur league (it's the weekend).

\* Man and wife both rise at 8am. She prepares breakfast, while also drinking coffee and listening to the radio (taking time to pause her food preparation when a particular item on the radio catches her attention). He helps their children wash and dress. Family eats together, then man washes up, while woman helps children choose snacks and clothes for a day out.

These series of examples highlight aspects of the dual characteristic of reproducing labour-power in that the organisation of reproduction is far from universal and reproductive work is not only in the service of capitalism. Which is to stress that labour-power can only exist in the living individual and reproduction involves "simultaneously a production and valorization of desired human qualities and capacities, [as well as] an accommodation to the externally imposed standards of the labor market" (Federici 2012:99). Federici argues "as impossible as it is, then, to draw a line between the living individual and its labor power, it is equally impossible to draw a line between the two corresponding aspects of reproductive work" (2012:99). The perspective of reproductive labour as a dual process that reproduces labour-



power and *at the same time* produces human beings is useful in that it “suggests a world of conflicts, resistances, contradictions that have political significance” (Federici 2012:99).

In this thesis the presentation of reproduction as a series of interlocking practices and processes of labour highlights reproduction as structured by the ‘materiality of doing’. The perspective of reproduction that is developed is one that seeks to make *visible* that which has been hidden and erased. Hidden and obscured through, on the one hand, the construction of reproduction as natural and biological, as well as the erasure and continued devaluation of reproduction through its commodification into low-waged service work. In so far as the perspective of reproduction as a labour processes places an emphasis on doing, it is also useful to highlight the affective relations of care. At a generalised and somewhat generic level, care can be understood as “everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web” (Tronto 1993:103).

It is possible to extend the conceptualisation of care as posited by Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2010, 2012) to that of reproduction, and as such to argue that reproduction and relations of care share conceptual and ontological resonance. Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) argues that, in worlds made up of heterogeneous interdependent forms and processes of life and matter, to reproduce something or somebody is inevitably to create relation. Such a conceptualisation of reproduction reveals it to have a peculiar significance as being a “non-normative obligation” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010); one that is concomitant to life, and not something forced upon living beings by a moral order. But nonetheless reproduction obliges, for life to be liveable it needs to be cared for, fostered and reproduced. It is in this sense that reproduction is somehow unavoidable: although not all relations can be defined as reproductive, none could subsist without reproductive labour.

At the same time reproduction is more than an affective state often evoked through discourses of care: it involves material engagement in labours to sustain interdependent worlds; labours that are often associated with exploitation and domination. In this way, the meaning of reproduction is not

straightforward in that “interdependency is not a contract but a condition, even a pre-condition” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012:198). Bringing these points together, it is possible to define contemporary reproduction as a series of practices and processes that are unavoidable yet also mobile in their spatiality and distribution; that presuppose not only relationality but also interdependency that emerges from worlds made up of heterogeneous interdependent practices and processes of life and matter.

#### **1.4 Neoliberal Reproduction**

The research presented in this thesis contributes to the growing feminist analyses of the considerable and ongoing transformations to labour and life that are characteristic of neoliberalism (Adkins and Dever 2014, Adkins 2005, Fraser 2009, Perrons 2012, Lewis 2001). The dismantling of the post-war consensus between capital and labour, in which the discourse of the male breadwinner, his ‘non-working housewife’ and the family wage were central, has involved a number of measures. Adkins and Dever outline the central mechanisms of change as

the deregulation of labour markets; the breakup of collective bargaining in regard to wages; the end of life-long employment; and the dismantling of employment contracts with rights and various forms of social provisions attached to them including for health care, unemployment and other social goods covering not only the worker (or, more precisely, certain workers) but also workers’ dependents (2014:55).

It is these mechanisms as outlined by Adkins and Dever, in conjunction with the rolling back of the welfare state and reductions in state investment in the reproduction of labour-power, that have seen the rationale for the family wage system (i.e. male breadwinner and female housewife) not only disrupted but “replaced with new and differently problematic ideals” (Adkins and Dever 2014:55). The male breadwinner and female housewife discourse of the post-war period has been replaced under neoliberalism by the “adult-worker model family” (Lewis 2001, Duncan et al. 2004), an organisation of work and family that assumes that “no matter what their circumstances — all adults are and should be in the labour market” (Adkins and Dever 2014:56).

In contrast to an understanding of neoliberalism as a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism, or an ideology that set loose the market to restore profitability for a capitalist class, Wendy Brown articulates neoliberalism from a Foucauldian perspective as an “order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic value, practices and metric to every dimension of human life” (2015:30). In her narration of the changes to her conditions of employment since the 1970s, Joy gives voice to some of the metrics of neoliberalism: from the ‘efficiency’ and profitability of poor quality school meals delivered by contractors to the privatisation of public assets such as transport and the expansion of the private care market through direct government policy.

Under neoliberalism, the ‘rationality’ of the market is also brought to bear on non-economic spheres and practices; a process that reconfigures the knowledge, form, content and conduct appropriate to these spheres and practices (Brown 2015, 2003). Extending market values to non-economic spheres may not always involve monetisation (Mirowski 2013, Brown 2015)<sup>2</sup>. Rather, neoliberal rationality “disseminates the *mode of the market* to all domains and activities — even where money is not the issue — and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*” (Brown 2015:31). Under neoliberalism governing is recast as a technical, rather than political activity, one that produces a mobile technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising (Gill and Scharff 2011, Gilbert 2013, Crouch 2008).

In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Brown asks the question what happens when *homo oeconomicus* becomes normative across all spheres (and becomes the governing truth of public life, social life, work life, welfare, education and the family) to those positioned as women in the sexual

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<sup>2</sup> Brown provides examples of where neoliberalism interpellates us as subjects to think and act like contemporary market subjects, even in the instances where monetary wealth generation is not the immediate goal, for example, in how to approach one’s education, fitness, family life or neighbourhood (2015:31) in which obtaining a university degree is ‘investing in your future’, or engaging in the best health practices will produce ‘optimum results’.

division of labour that neoliberalism continues to depend upon and reproduce (2015:104). It is this interrelation, between an ascendant neoliberal governing rationality and the production of gender subjectivities, specifically that of motherhood, that is the focus of this thesis. Framing this another way, to understand how reproduction currently functions it is necessary to examine the specific ways that gender is put to work within a governing rationality that seeks to extend an ethic of the market into all aspects of life, while, at the same time depending on significant amounts of non-marketised and unwaged reproductive labour. Adkins and Dever argue that one of the consequences of the neoliberal reorganisation of social reproduction (that has redirected the costs and risk of reproducing labour-power away from the state and capital) has been the unravelling of the “sexual contract” (Pateman 1988) that defined the post-war period, as well as the reorganisation and redistribution of social reproduction as a form of labour.

Focusing on the intersection between reorganisation of labour and global migration, Wills *et al.* (2010) argue that the conditions of possibility for much of what is now referred to as neoliberalism began in conjunction with developments in other parts of the global economy as a series of experiments conducted to do battle with the British working-class.

When, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher and ministers like Norman Tebbit were elected on the promise of solving ‘the British disease’, they had their sights on unionised workers in car factories, mines and the docks (Wills *et al.* 2010:2).

Furthermore, they note that the contemporary reification of neoliberalism has a tendency to obscure its origins on the battlefield of the British class war and that “during the 1980s police and pickets regularly made war across the industrial landscapes that have since become part of the heritage industry” (Wills *et al.* 2010).

Wills *et al.* contend that, while groups of organised workers were picked off one by one and new industrial relations laws made it harder to organise, to strike and to secure secondary support to mount effective industrial action, “the Conservatives launched a much more deadly weapon against workers in the form of privatisation” (2010:3). As early as 1983, the NHS was subcontracting ‘non-essential’ staff like cleaners, cooks and security guards under government guidelines that stipulated ‘market testing’ to save money.

The same approach was later applied to local government in the form of compulsory competitive tendering. “The women cooking and serving meals to school children and the men emptying bins joined hospital cleaners on the sharp end of a new form of employment” (Wills et al. 2010:3). The dynamics of the subcontracting model of employment, such as the requirement for regular re-tendering and the intense competition between contractors, results in wages, conditions and staffing levels all being kept at minimum levels.

This dynamic, which can be characterised as a race to the bottom with regards to wages and conditions, is one that is expressed by Joy when she narrates leaving her job in school catering after it was privatised and she loses control over what food she can cook. Another characteristic of neoliberalism appears when Joy explains that she left her job driving buses when the private company wanted her to work more hours for less pay. One of the effects of the neoliberal deregulation of labour has been the restructuring of the manufacturing sector (much of it moved offshore) and significant increases in service sector employment. In this way, the neoliberal deregulation of labour has witnessed a reorganisation of gendered as well as racialised, class relations. This is reflected in the disproportionate number of women and, in particular, migrant women, employed in the reproductive service industries of childcare, elder care, cleaning, customer service and the sex industries (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

Neoliberal attempts to extend an ethic of the market to ever-increasing aspects of life have occurred alongside the “systematic disinvestment by the state in the reproduction of the workforce, implemented through structural adjustment programs and the dismantling of the welfare state” (Federici, 2012:101). It is worth highlighting that the outsourcing of aspects of the state has often occurred prior to the generalised development of the massified service-industry— an example of forms of governance producing markets where there were none previously, which is characteristic of neoliberalism (Mirowski 2013). In other words the metrics of neoliberal reproduction can be thought of as involving both the dramatic redistribution of state investment (for example via redirection of state funds to private companies through outsourcing, Public Private Partnerships, or through student loans for higher education) as well as the transformation and reorganisation of reproductive

activities into value-producing services that workers must purchase and pay for.

Indeed, in global cities like London (Sassen 1991) it is strikingly difficult to think of a service or activity that one cannot, in fact, buy, from the more mainstream child, elder and disability care, cleaning, gardening and customer services in cafés and restaurants; to the more specialised services of sex workers; doulas<sup>3</sup>; therapists, beauticians, dating and relationship assistants, personal assistants, personal trainers, personal shoppers and hairdressers. There are people who can teach your child to swim, dance, speak a foreign language or play a musical instrument, who can walk your dog or even be your friend<sup>4</sup>. The “service networking” website Task Rabbit encourages customers to “outsource your household errands and skilled tasks to trusted people in your community”<sup>5</sup>. The proliferation of commodified forms of reproduction has had a profound effect on where the work of reproduction takes place and has also disrupted previously naturalised discourses of what can and ought to be bought and sold.

Federici (2012) argues that, as public funding and government subsidies to healthcare, education, pensions, and public transport have been reduced and workers have been forced, under neoliberalism, to take on the cost of their reproduction, every articulation of the reproduction of labour-power has been transformed into an immediate point of accumulation. The considerable transformations to social reproduction that have occurred in the last 40 years are such that socially reproductive labour is increasingly organised through commercial markets; is increasingly commodified where, rather than unpaid, this work is now paid and the spatial rearrangement of reproduction has seen a movement of such labour from the private sphere to the market sphere (Adkins and Dever 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Doulas support women and their families during pregnancy, childbirth and early parenthood. This support is practical and emotional but non-medical in nature’ (<http://www.doula.org.uk/> - last accessed 1 Feb, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> “You can rent a local Friend to hang out with, go to a movie or restaurant with, or someone to go with you to a party or event. Rent a friend to teach you a new skill or hobby, or to show you around an unfamiliar town. RentAFriend.com is strictly a platonic Friendship website. RentAFriend.com is NOT a dating website, and NOT an Escort agency. Services on RentAFriend.com are strictly for FRIENDSHIP purposes only” (<http://www.rentafriend.com>, last accessed 1 Feb, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.taskrabbit.co.uk> (last accessed 1 Feb, 2016)

The transformations to social reproduction cannot however be analysed as narrowly-determined by neoliberal governance and the deregulation of labour and financial markets. The radical changes that have occurred to British family life, to the home and to the labour of reproduction are also the result of women's struggles that emerged in the 1960s and exploded in the 1970s. The expansion of women working in waged employment in Britain has increased rapidly since the 1970s and, of the overall increase in women working outside the home, it has been the number of married women with children that has expanded most rapidly. In the mid 1990s, around 67 percent of married or cohabitating mothers with dependent children were in waged work and by 2013 this had increased to 72 percent (ONS 2013b). It is maternal employment, specifically women returning to work after having children, that has increased most rapidly in the last 40 years. One effect has been a shift away from 'family life' as the centre of women's world to one characterised by the constant negotiation of family responsibilities performed alongside the demands of waged work (McDowell 2013:13).

Consider that between the 1880s and 1930s only a third of women of working age in Britain were in waged employment and that marriage and the birth of children often resulted in women withdrawing from the waged labour market. In *A Woman's Place: an oral history of working-class women 1890-1940* (1984), Elizabeth Roberts presents a picture of working-class women's lives in the first half of nineteenth century Britain, women for whom family life was often central and consuming, who managed on small budgets and experienced grinding poverty, performing time-consuming and physically demanding domestic work, giving birth to and raising large families, supported by friends and neighbours and mostly only working for wages when the household budget required it.

Contrast that with the next seven decades— decades in which significant social and economic change has occurred that has transformed the lives of women, including but certainly not limited to, the ever-increasing number of women who have joined the waged labour market (McDowell 2013). The role of feminist social movements in creating change both at work and in the home can not be understated, in as much as women's struggles in the 1970s and 1980s shifted the reality of women's lives with legislation focusing on

equality and anti-discrimination in the workplace, changes to the delivery of women's health and the availability of contraception, changes to divorce laws and greater acceptance of non-traditional family structures, including single parent households, LGBT and same-sex families (Rowbotham 1989a). These shifts are visible not only in the different patterns and organisation of women's waged and unwaged reproductive work but also government policies concerning childcare provision, 'work/family' balance policies and maternity leave and pay (Lewis 1992, Lewis, Campbell, and Huerta 2008).

During the last 40 years there has been a general decline in decent well-paid, manufacturing-based employment and, specifically, the destruction of the conditions of possibility for the male 'family' wage (Lewis 2001). These transformations in both waged and unwaged labour have led to the corresponding necessity of (at least) two incomes to support and maintain the majority of British households— a trend that has been identified as the "adult-worker family model" in which all adults, regardless of their circumstances, are expected to be in the waged labour market (Adkins and Dever 2014). A further factor driving increased female participation in the labour force arguably has been the increasing importance of service industries in the British economy. As has already been noted, there is a disproportionate number of women and, in particular, migrant women, employed in the service industries of childcare, elder care, cleaning, customer service and the sex industries (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). The export of the neoliberal economic model to the rest of the world, where governments in the global South have been encouraged and, in some instances compelled, to reduce state expenditure, privatise state assets, liberalise markets, reduce import tariffs and facilitate inward investments, has helped to create both the necessity and desire for people, many of them women, to migrate across international borders in search of work (Wills et al. 2010).

Wills *et al.* (2010) argue that there is a connection between the impact of the new forms of global political economy of neoliberalism and the subcontracting employment model, in particular, and increased rates of global migration. Of relevance to the arguments explored in this thesis are the connections — as well as the moments of conflict — that bring the neoliberal experiments conducted against the British organised working-class and the



destruction of manufacturing-based jobs into dialogue with the increases in service-based industries, female employment and global migration. Moreover as (some) women have increasingly demanded and won economic, social and political autonomy from men, the work of reproductive labour has had to be redistributed. Another way of framing this would be to argue that the people — or, more correctly, the women who used to do the caring, affective and domestic work in a unpaid capacity in the home — no longer have the time, ability or desire to do so. Without the previous army of unwaged female workers to perform the work necessary to produce and reproduce labour-power and daily life, women's increased participation in waged work in places like Britain has relied on and pulled another group of women — predominately migrants and working-class women — into the sphere of waged reproductive work (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003, Folbre 1994, Hochschild and Machung 2003, Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2004).

In so far as it can be said that reproductive labour remains central to the construction of gender, it is important to stress that different women do varying amounts of, and different types of, reproductive labour (Rollins 1985). And, as much as it has constituted a basis for a common struggle between women, the unequal distribution of reproductive labour operates in such a way so as to not only separate and differentiate women from men but also women from each other. That reproductive labour produces conflict and division between women can, to a large degree, be traced to the intersection of reproductive labour with the histories of domestic service and that of slavery, colonialism, and migration and to different racialised definitions of work and family (Collins 2000, Davis 1983). As this thesis will demonstrate, the differentiated meaning attached to reproductive work and the unequal power relations that the organisation of reproductive work within capitalist societies produces among women, means that reproduction has always been gendered, class-based and racialised.

When we trace some of the histories of reproductive labour, it becomes clear that there is nothing 'new' about the existence of waged and/or commodified reproductive labour. The historical prevalence of domestic service in Britain — an industry that employed upwards of one-third of all working-age women in the nineteenth century is an obvious case in point (Todd 2009), as

are the long histories of people of all genders selling sex and sexual services (Agustin 2007). However, the contemporary organisation of commodified reproductive services has involved both transformations to the work itself and also considerable expansion of what services can be bought and sold (Boris and Parrenas 2010). The phenomenon of the “international division of reproductive labour” (Parrenas 2001) has been the object of an extensive feminist and sociological literature that examines how global changes to care, sex and domestic work have affected the organisation of reproductive work, with considerable amounts of research conducted into the conditions of work and the specific forms of exploitation to which migrants are exposed and subjected<sup>6</sup>. In much of this literature, though certainly not all, the focus is nearly exclusively on the domestic/privatised sphere of the (employers’) home and, in particular, care, cleaning and domestic work that is waged.

One of the consequences of developing an analysis of reproduction that only focuses on one form (waged) and in one sphere (the private home) is that there is a tendency to obscure the connections and tensions that domestic labour has with other instances of waged reproductive labour — for instance, the multi-national and highly lucrative commercial cleaning industry or the provision of ‘public’ care in hospitals, elder care homes, or childcare centres. A number of scholars have argued that white middle- to upper-class women have made gains (in employment, in gender relations at home and in society generally) by being able to transfer their reproductive work onto other women who are, more often than not, poorer, migrants and women of colour (Parrenas 2001, 2008, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007, Anderson 2000, Glenn 1992, Romero 2002). Romero argues that “white middle-class women not only benefit from racial and class discrimination which provides them cheap labor but actively contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of an oppressive system” (2002:78).

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<sup>6</sup> Research has focused on Latina and Chicana domestic workers in the USA (Romero 2002, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007), African American domestic workers (Rollins 1985), Japanese American domestic workers (Glenn 1986), Filipina domestic workers and globalization (Parrenas 2001, 2008), domestic and sex workers in the global economy (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003, Boris and Parrenas 2010) and migrant sex workers in Europe (Agustin 2007). Authors have also framed the question of domestic work within national and regional contexts with studies focusing on migrant domestic workers in Taiwan (Lan 2006), Europe (Anderson 2000), Germany (Lutz 2011), Britain (Cox 2006), Hong Kong (Constable 2007), and Sri Lanka (Gamburd 2000).

My concern with arguments such as these is that they have a tendency to construct waged domestic work in the home as exceptional and somehow disconnected from other instances of racialised and class difference between women. I think it is important to note that middle- and upper-class women make gains through multiple intersections with labour hierarchies that mobilise relations of race and class, gains that are not limited to their decisions and behaviour in relation to domestic work. I would argue that any analysis of waged domestic work in employers' homes needs to be brought into dialogue with an analysis of the service and care sectors more generally and also of unwaged reproductive labour, including the unwaged domestic work of migrant domestic workers in their own communities as well as the remaining distribution of reproductive labour in households that employ domestic workers. In this way, waged domestic work can be analysed within the context of the transformations that have occurred to work inside and outside the home and in both the global North and South. When placed in dialogue with other structures of reproductive labour, instances of waged domestic work can be understood, not as exceptional or unique, but as central to regimes of racialised and gendered labour hierarchies.

## **1.5 Thesis Structure**

This thesis provides an account of how certain aspects of reproductive labour function under neoliberalism and of how the subjectivity of motherhood is a contingent outcome of capitalist development and a direct result of government intervention. The interrelation between the subjectivity of motherhood and the political economy of motherhood is investigated through a feminist genealogy of 24-hour childcare in Britain.

In the following chapter, Chapter Two, I provide an account of the mixed methods of genealogy and ethnography that inform the research. I outline how, in the process of investigating what I had identified as some of the central elements of contemporary reproduction— namely the increasingly commodified character of certain aspects of reproduction, the continued gendered basis of the work and the powerful contradictions that arise as a result of reproduction being both devalued and romanticised — two

important realisations occurred. The first was that I needed to interrogate how both feminism and neoliberalism had simultaneously transformed reproduction and the second, that how the present of reproduction is understood, organised and produced is connected to historical processes that, at least initially, are connected to practices and processes that emerged in Britain as far back as the early 1970s.

The grammar of reproduction, as outlined in Chapter Three, posits several elements of a contemporary definition of reproduction: reproduction as a labour process; one that is structured by a dual characteristic that involves both unwaged and waged forms of labour. The chapter begins with a definition of reproduction inherited from feminist movements in the 1970s and tests its continuing validity. In particular, the chapter focuses on one of the key texts from the 'domestic labour debates', *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, first published in English in 1972. The rationale for producing a definition is to map a terrain of knowledge, one that draws on a conceptualisation of reproduction as animated by gendered and racialised conflicts, resistance and struggle. Moreover, tracing the boundaries of reproduction enables some of the discursive formations that structure motherhood to be made visible and interrogated historically.

By following the thread of labour — specifically, by developing a perspective of reproduction as a labour processes, I sketch a method of investigation that is able to account for and make visible those aspects of the everyday that have been coded as natural, performed in an unwaged capacity, wrapped up in love, emotion and obligation and overwhelmingly performed by women. However, conceptualising reproduction as a labour process is not the same as defining it narrowly as a job. The framing of reproduction as a labour process enables the mapping of the interlocking forms of waged (the instances where reproduction is indeed someone's job) and with that of unwaged reproductive labour.

Chapter Four analyses some of the elements of the present organisation of work and care in neoliberal Britain and explores the current provision of 24-hour childcare in two different locations; a private nursery in Purley and a local council-run childminding scheme in northwest London. The development of 24-hour childcare in Britain is situated within an analysis of

the gendered transformations that have occurred to the conditions of waged work. The chapter traces the rise and proliferation of atypical working hours alongside the polarisation of employment conditions into what Maarten Goos and Alan Manning describe as “lousy and lovely jobs” (2003). Analysing the introduction of New Labour’s *National Childcare Strategy* in 1998 and the subsequent expansion and marketisation of the childcare sector, the chapter argues that the language of choice has been influential in structuring both feminist and neoliberal discourses of women’s work and the labour of reproduction.

The discourse of choice also frames much of the analysis developed in Chapter Five, in which I consider the construction of motherhood as both situated within the terms of lived experience and as one that is in a constant state of contestation. The analysis in the chapter makes use of several different and distinct discursive articulations of motherhood that are drawn from interviews with mothers in London; semi-autobiographical texts on motherhood written by prominent women in the media; the regular media column written by “Working Mum”; and recent research by Saatchi & Saatchi, *Motherhood: It’s Not A Job* (2015). The neoliberal construction of motherhood that emerges is one that is naturalised and organised as a privatised consumer experience. The discourse of choice is examined alongside that of luck, specifically ‘being lucky’ or ‘feeling lucky’ to have the time to be a stay-at-home mother and the role of planning and mechanisms of neoliberal governance that produce what Wendy Brown describes as “responsibilization” (2015).

In Chapter Six I return to 24-hour childcare however, this time, not as a contemporary childcare service as in Chapter Four but, rather, as an echo of a political demand made four decades ago by feminists in the Women’s Liberation Movement. The investigation of the historical demand for 24-hour childcare is drawn from extensive archival materials, memoirs and oral histories of women’s struggles in the 1970s. I explore the different articulations of class and gender in the feminist critique of the domestic destiny of women alongside working women’s struggle for equal pay and employment. The chapter returns to an analysis of *Power of Women and Subversion of the Community* to explore the crisis that the family wage system

of male breadwinner and female unwaged care enters in the 1970s. The chapter also disrupts the history of feminism as being solely focused on motherhood and employment rights through an incorporation of some of the insights of the Black Women's Movement that emerged in the 1970s.

I argue in Chapter Seven that, to sufficiently grasp the history of how reproduction came to be organised in the way it is today, it is necessary to examine the period prior to the 1970s — specifically the post-war years. By which I mean that, to understand the separate yet interrelated moments of the emergence of neoliberalism as a governing political rationality and women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s, it is necessary to understand what came before them. I investigate the construction of the British welfare state through an analysis of the organisation of gender as outlined by William Beveridge in his 1942 report *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, alongside the proliferation of ideas about mothering as popularised by post-Freudian psychologists such as Dr John Bowlby. Within the two terrains of the economic and social organisation of post-war gender relations, a number of discourses emerge, such as ideas of intensive and continuous motherhood, fears of population decline and the need to reconstruct the family. I argue that it is the proliferation of these discourses, in conjunction with the government strategy of in-migration from the former colonies, that produced the possibility for certain women in the 1970s to so forcibly take aim at the family, motherhood and the family wage system.

The connections and separations produced through the reproduction of labour-power in Britain and the histories of colonialism are further explored in Chapter Eight. The chapter uses the profoundly racist and sexist concept of 'breeding' to trace some of the connections between the transatlantic slave trade, constructions of motherhood and the organisation of reproductive labour. Through an engagement with the work of Black and post-colonial feminists, I examine the way in which the enslavement and exploitation of women in the colonies was connected to processes that reconfigured domestic work in the home as white women's 'natural' and 'proper' role. The chapter considers how the construction and function of motherhood and women's naturalised domestic role in Britain relied on the exclusion, exploitation and disciplining of certain bodies, specifically women of colour and working

mothers. I explore the complexities of domestic and family structures under slavery in order to challenge tendencies within feminist theory that assume a universal or 'shared' female experience of home, motherhood and the domestic sphere. Moreover, if the home is not essentially repressive, the question becomes how some homes can be sites of significant resistance, while others are sites of domination. This opens up a pragmatic and operative conceptualisation of the home as a site of domination/resistance.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis and uses the metaphor of researching reproduction as the investigation of a series of knots. Some of the knots of reproduction examined in this thesis are old knots — knots that can be thought of as having been bound together during the emergence of industrial capitalism —while others, freshly tied, appear to be new and the result of contemporary struggles and conflicts. The task of trying to unravel the old and the new knots of reproduction highlights that motherhood was, and continues to be, held together as much by relations of race and class as it is by gender. Another knot, one that is relevant for the development of a critical feminist politics of reproduction, is the need to revalue the labour of reproduction without recourse to a politics that is nostalgic for the past or romantic about non-commodified domestic labour, work that has dominated and structured most women's lives up until very recently. The tensions, knots and contradictions present in the sphere of reproduction reposition the "Woman Question" as, yet again, the unavoidable and necessary concern for comprehending and intervening in the brutalising consequences of capitalist accumulation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Beginnings, Numberless Beginnings

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In fact, from one point of view, we cannot unravel one female's narrative from the other's, cannot decipher one without tripping over the other – Hortense Spillers (1987:77).

#### 2.1 Methods, Data and Scale

This thesis is interested in *how* the present of reproduction is understood, *how* it is organised and *how* it has been produced. The research project began with the intention of using a multi-sited ethnographic study, a method that “moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus 1998:96). This method initially appeared the most appropriate to not only study the contemporary organisation of reproduction but, also, to address the multi-scalar character of reproduction that became visible via my attempts to map the present.

However, in the course of investigating the connections between the multiple sites I identified as central to the contemporary organisation of reproduction, namely: the increasingly commodified character of certain aspects of reproduction; the stubbornly gendered nature of the work and the contradictions that arise as a result of reproduction being both devalued and romanticised, it became clear that there were two important factors I had to take into account in the research. The first was that to grasp the current organisation of reproduction in Britain it was necessary to interrogate how both neoliberalism and feminism had concurrently reorganised and restructured reproduction. Focusing on either one to the exclusion of the other was not going to sufficiently capture the complex ways we currently make and remake people as both humans and as workers. My second realisation, somewhat connected to the first was that the present of



reproduction has a long history; one that was, at least initially, connected to historical practices and process that started to emerge in Britain as far back as the early 1970s.

In my efforts to understand the present, the 1970s kept reappearing as a period in which women's struggles articulated a critique, not only of motherhood, but also of reproduction more generally and as the decade that saw the emergence, uneven and disjointed as it was, of neoliberalism. Methodologically I needed to move from a spatial to a temporal framework, while keeping each in their interrelation, so as to be able to account for the present. It became clear that I needed to understand what had happened in Britain during the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement and equally what had occurred prior to the election in 1979 of the Thatcher Government, principal architect of neoliberalism in Britain. This process of reappearance occurred again as I started to investigate the 1970s. This time it was the earlier post-war period and the specific way that constructions of motherhood, the home and the family wage intersected with the creation of the welfare state and governmental strategies of in-migration to address labour shortages.

My realisation of the centrality of feminism and neoliberalism to contemporary reproduction and the frequent moving back and forth between the past and present meant that, while critical ethnographic methods were sufficient to capture the present of reproduction, I needed to incorporate a second approach, namely genealogy. As such, methodologically, the research developed to encompass qualitative methodological approaches utilising two lines of investigation: critical ethnography and genealogy. The research presented in this thesis makes use of critical ethnographic methods including participant observation, interviews and reflections on past experiences in the field. In addition, discourse analysis and archival research are central to the genealogical methods utilised. In *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences*, Moore *et al.* (2016) discuss the 'archival turn' that has taken place over the last few decades, with an increase of interest in the social sciences in archives and collections as sites for research. Discussing several texts by Jacques Derrida, in particular his influential *Archive Fever* (1995), they posit that the archive is "originary because inscribed by memory traces, but

it is mnemonically faulty, incomplete, or perhaps even wrong" (2016:11). In addition to Derrida, Moore *et al.* also situate Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* (2001) within the archival turn, in which the archive "is a literal and material place and site of intersecting labour processes, the researcher's, the archivist's, those of the people of the past whose trace remains" (Moore et al. 2016:12).

I spent seven months investigating various archives, focusing initially on materials related to the Women's Liberation Movement. The archives I accessed included; The Women's Library, The Feminist Library, MayDay Rooms Archive and the personal collections of Dee Hunt (Brisbane) and Silvia Federici (New York). However, with some important exceptions, the majority of the archival materials I initially accessed reflected the campaigns and experiences of predominately white women involved in the Women's Liberation Movement. Reflecting on the research data revealed that there were significant silences and gaps in the collections, especially at the Women's Library. Certain communities and subjects never seemed to stand centre stage or even make it into some of the archives. These silences and gaps are not mere oversights or benign absences but reflect the defeat of particular struggles and the erasure of certain conflicts, processes and silences.

Once I started to pay attention to the silences, the archival research took another turn, to different archives in different neighbourhoods, including the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton and the Sisterhood and After Oral History Archive at the British Library. In the 1970s, women of colour drew connections between labour migration and systematic racial discrimination in the post-war period and insisted that their journey to Britain had been structured and produced by British colonialism and slavery. The archival research highlighted that the history of the emergence of capitalism and, in particular, the specific ways that gender was put to work in the violent and messy transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism needed to be assessed alongside the processes of accumulation, innovation and violence that was made possible via slavery and the colonial system.

By bringing both ethnography and genealogy together, the research presents a 'history of the present' of reproduction and deploys a methodology that is able to account for the multi-scalar character of reproduction. In this instance,

the multi-scalar character of reproduction is understood as involving both a process of abstraction and at the same time, the lived, everyday experiences of making and remaking people and labour-power in neoliberal Britain.

The problem of the scale of reproduction can be articulated, on the one hand, in the idea that reproduction operates as a lived experience encompassing the “fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (Katz 2001:711), and, on the other hand, as processes that are gendered, coded as natural and often tucked away and hidden in the domestic realm. The everyday nature of reproduction operates in such a way that can make it difficult to capture, made still more difficult because much of reproduction is not directly goal-oriented, but involves work, time and activity that can be considered as the work of repair or maintenance (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012). The question of scale also appears when we consider that reproduction exists at the level of abstraction; as a system of value production; reproduction also operates at the level of the formation of class subjects — indeed subjects who are always-already gendered and racialised — and at the level of the reproduction of class relations

In addition, reproduction often only becomes visible when there is a problem, a crisis or in instances of its absence. A simple example would be the reproductive labour of washing dishes. When one enters a freshly cleaned kitchen it can be hard to see and, importantly, to value the labour that has gone into washing the dishes, wiping down the benches and putting the dishes away. However, a stack of dirty dishes, piled up and smelling of the previous meal makes the problem of reproduction visible. The absence of reproduction allows us to see the work of doing the dishes and perhaps also to see the importance of the allocation of who has to do the task. A slightly more complex example would be the neglect of a child; again, it is the lack of reproduction that is visible. Through the absence of reproductive labour it is easier to capture some of the processes and practices of raising and caring for children, especially considering the nearly never-ending hours of affective labour and physical tasks that are required to keep young children fed, educated, healthy and feeling loved.

## 2.2 A History of the Present

In this thesis, genealogy is understood as a task that involves trying to understand how the present came to be the way we understand it today by making visible the technologies of reproduction and the construction and reorganisation of the subjectivity of motherhood. In his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1984), Michel Foucault insists that genealogy's duty is not to demonstrate that "the past actively exists in the present" (1984:81). He firmly disrupts versions of history or 'truth' that rely on a linear and teleological evolution of human development. Foucault's genealogical method suggests that the researcher not only ask if such history is really true, but "what function of power each purported 'truth' serves, what each fiction disguises, displaces, enforces and mobilises" (Brown 2001:95). It is not that the past somehow continues to "secretly animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form" (Foucault 1984:81). It is that genealogy allows us to identify "the accidents, the minute deviations - or conversely, the complete reversals — the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" (Foucault 1984:81).

The research presented in this thesis is a feminist genealogical account of the contemporary provision of 24-hour childcare in Britain. In tracing the history of 24-hour care, my investigation in the archives of the Women's Liberation Movement highlighted that one of the original demands of the women's movement was for "free 24-hour nurseries". These two moments of 24-hour childcare are marked within the research grid: one pinpoints the privatised provision of flexible, extended and overnight care that is currently provided in Britain and the other marks the historical 1970s feminist demand for such care to be provided by the state. It is these two moments that provide the overall structure for the ethnographic and genealogical research presented in this thesis. Through interrogating these two moments and the events that surround them an unravelling of previously individual stories occurs. Hortense Spillers (1987) reminds us that we cannot unravel one female's narrative from the other's; we cannot hope to understand one without tripping over the other. In other words, we cannot hope to understand the feminist demand for adequate, flexible and state-provided childcare without

also exploring the global restructuring of reproduction and the interconnected histories of colonialism and slavery with the more recent histories of women's migration from the global South and Eastern Europe.

Bringing together the work of Foucault and Nietzsche to develop what she calls "a genealogical politics", Brown posits that "genealogy permits an examination of our condition that calls into question the very term of its constitution" (2001:95). For Brown, what genealogy offers as a method is "an inquiry into the 'past of the present' in which the categories constitutive of the present are themselves rendered historical" (2001:95). As such, she argues that "the measure of genealogy's success is its disruption of conventional accounts of ourselves — our sentiments, bodies, origins and futures" (2001:95).

It is this potential of the 'disruption of conventional accounts' that makes genealogy a useful method for investigating the sphere of reproduction: the domestic home and the historically gendered and racialised work required to care for people and raise children. This is especially so if one recognises that the construction of motherhood and the domestic home are sites that are always-already naturalised; sites that possess "a history that is buried by the naturalization of values as universal and transhistorical" (Brown 2001:97). The implication of such a recognition is that it avoids starting from a position that romanticises the home or having children as inherently 'good' or 'natural' or, conversely to moralise about the 'bad' effects of the commodification of reproductive work.

Maria Tamboukou proposes that a starting point for "doing genealogies" involves focusing on a particular problem and then trying to see the problem in its historical dimension, specifically, "how this problem turned out to be the way we perceive it today" (1999:213). To enunciate the genealogical method therefore would be to emphasise *how* (as opposed to *why*) the present came to be the way we recognise it today. Such an emphasis pays attention to the minor details, hidden practices, processes and bodies of knowledge — "the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault 1980:194). In doing so, genealogy lays the measure for its success in being disruptive of convention; in making the strange familiar and the familiar strange (Brown 2001:97).

Ethnography, at least its modern critical variants, can be read in a similar way: disrupting experience through the experience of difference. In so far as this research project utilises both critical ethnography and genealogy as two lines of investigation and analysis, it does so from an understanding that genealogy and ethnography represent different theoretical approaches. Part of the melding together of ethnography and genealogy addresses the question of emergence. Maria Tamboukou and Stephen Ball (2003:3) argue that, despite their different traditions, genealogy and ethnography share several orientations and points of reference: they disrupt the authority of scientific knowledge and universalist dogmas of truth; adopt a context-bound critical perspective; resist closed theoretical and methodological systems; recover excluded subjects and voices; highlight the centrality of the body and restore the political dimension of research.

At the same time, Tamboukou and Ball also point to the differences that such a meeting of ethnography and genealogy produces, deriving from the roots of their research practices in modernism and postmodernism respectively. Consequently, there is an important distinction between the “conception of *power as sovereignty* in ethnography and *power as deployment* in genealogy” (Tamboukou and Ball 2003:8). They argue that bringing these two conceptions of power together creates new possibilities to critically rethink the notion of power. Such a rethinking of power can highlight the asymmetric distribution of power at the same time as attempting to better understand how power/knowledge regimes are created and sustained (Tamboukou and Ball 2003:9).

By asking the question of how, as opposed to why, 24-hour childcare emerged in Britain, this thesis draws on the traditions of both critical ethnography and genealogy. The focus on the *how* seeks to analyse the complex ways subjectivities are constituted and “conceives of human reality not as an originary force, but as an effect of the interweaving of certain historical and cultural practices” (Tamboukou and Ball 2003:10). The genealogical investigation seeks to produce a ‘history of the present’; a task that, according to Tamboukou (2003), involves the researcher necessarily distancing herself from the present. Indeed, in ethnography the researcher is part of the research process and, at the same time, she is also required to be reflective about it. In

this way, ethnography is defined by a tension between involvement and distance, 'stranger and friend', 'being there' and 'standing back' (Tamboukou and Ball 2003).

### **2.3 Situating the Researcher and Situated Knowledge**

This tension between the necessity for involvement as well as distance that informs the ethnographic method requires a mode of reflexivity. Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of situated or partial knowledge has been a major influence for feminist methodologies in the social sciences and has significantly informed the development of this research project. Situated knowledge, as articulated by Haraway, is a form of objectivity that accounts for both the agency of the knowledge producer and that of the object of the study. Situated knowledge questions the foundational myths of traditional scientific objectivity: the object of inquiry as passive and stable, the subject as a simple, singular point of knowledge-gathering and the scientific gaze as an omniscient observer. Through situated knowledge subjects become more complex, possessing will and vision, and the knowledge producers' gaze is dissolved into a network of contested observations.

Furthermore, feminist objectivity endorses conversation not only between observers, but also between the observer and the object. Haraway re-interprets observation as a conversation: feminist objectivity "makes room for the surprises and ironies in the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world" (1988:593). There is a productive synergy between an orientation towards situated knowledge production that makes room for surprises and ironies and a Foucauldian genealogical investigation that seeks to identify the accidents, errors, deviations and faulty calculations that produced the present.

The task of making the strange familiar and the familiar strange that genealogy suggests, combined with the productive tension of 'being there' and 'standing back' that is involved in ethnography, enabled me to investigate the multi-scalar character of reproduction (the interrelation between, on the one hand, reproduction as an abstraction, and, on the other, the materiality of everyday life) as well as addressing the question of

proximity. I needed different approaches to analyse the different problems and questions that arise from researching reproduction at different levels. Throughout the entire project, I have not only been studying reproduction, but have also been involved in the everyday practices and processes of raising two small children. At the same time, and with considerable unease and disquiet, I also occupy the subject position of being a mother and a wife. Of course, one could argue that everyone — young and old, with and without children — is involved (as producers and consumers) in the processes and practices of reproduction. However, the fact that *everybody* is involved does not render their involvement equal nor does it necessarily produce common experiences. In other words, reproduction is an ordinary but not universal experience, as well as being both particular and abstract.

Cutting the problem of reproduction in one direction situates me as researcher with dual membership (Anderson 2006) of both the academy and motherhood. However, slicing the problem from a different perspective and it is my long-term membership of feminist movements that is relevant. Continuing with the mode of reflexivity, my location is that of a partisan researcher with (at least) triple membership of the academy, motherhood and feminism. To the extent that my research is a work of genealogy and critical ethnography and is broadly located within the radical social sciences, such partisanship does not undermine my research. Indeed, much recent critical ethnographic research had been orientated deliberately on partisan foundations (Marcus 1998, Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007, Thomas 1993).

My point here is not that my triple membership provided access to research sites; it certainly did with admittance to playgroups, access to the personal archives of feminists, invitations to have cups of tea with local mothers and considerable time spent in nurseries, schools and feminist campaign meetings. Rather, it is by investigating reproduction as a labour process, and crucially, being situated within the embodied processes of *having to* do the labour of raising two kids on a daily basis, analysing my own experiences, those around me and those I interviewed, as well as digging around in the past, has not only made me a different researcher, but it has also made me a different mother and feminist.



## 2.4 Grey Documents and Ethnographic Encounters

The methodological task of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar with regard to reproduction necessitated developing a research praxis that is both situated and considerably messy. The eight ethnographic encounters that appear throughout the thesis have been produced through my partisan position as a researcher with membership to multiple communities of reference. They are usefully understood as having been produced through the enactment of my situated position as a researcher. They provide an occasional interruption and insight into the methodological approaches of the research, though they are neither chronological nor exhaustive of the research process. Their inclusion also speaks to my desire to find ways to make the labour of research visible by highlighting the moment of convergence and accidents as well as the planning and attention to detail that makes research possible.

The genealogist proceeds with the understanding that genealogy requires “patience and knowledge of detail and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material” (Foucault 1984:76). Not only is genealogy “grey”, it works with “meticulous and patiently documentary material” (Foucault 1984:76). In so far as a genealogical analysis does not attempt to reconstruct the past or trace the effects of past events in the present, a genealogy does “make the effort to look directly at what people do” (Tamboukou 1999:209). Moreover, within the genealogical method there is a considerable element of discourse analysis required. Critical discourse analysis is an approach to discourse analysis that draws on both linguistic and sociological methods and is grounded in critical (e.g. Marxist and Foucauldian) social theories (Fairclough 2001:122). This thesis makes use of critical discourse analysis and draws on the contributions of Norman Fairclough and Siegfried Jäger. Both scholars outline a largely functionalist account of discourse analysis, one focused on following or ‘tracking’ (Fairclough 2001:125) a problem across a field of research in order to locate it socially and outline the emergent order that animates both discourse and practice around it (Jäger 2001:40, Fairclough 2001:126-7).

In my analysis of 24-hour childcare, the publication of *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in

1972 is a temporal marker. The publication of the text provided a spark and operated as a source of provocation in feminist debates concerning domestic work (Malos 1980). It also became the foundational text for the international Wages for Housework campaign (James 1975a). The text is read as an expression of some of the feminist critiques of the family, motherhood, the domestic sphere and women's unpaid reproductive labour. The text operates as a device through which to unpack the interrelation and moments of tension between, on the one-hand, women's role within the family as the always-already unwaged reproductive workers of capitalism and, on the other, the formation of the welfare state and the discourse of the family wage.

At the same time, the text is analysed as a minority perspective within the British women's movement and is certainly not presented as representative of the movement. Instead, it operates as a marker that makes visible some of the conflicts and disagreements *within* the women's movement. I traced and analysed archival documents that captured various conflicts and disagreements in the women's struggles about the meaning and role of domestic labour. I made use of leaflets and campaign materials by childcare workers; records of parents attempts to set up radical crèches, discussion papers about the original four demands of the Women's Liberation movement<sup>7</sup>, records of the proceedings of national women's conferences, the critiques and criticisms of the women's movement by Black and Asian activists and oral histories of women involved in the Black Women's Movement. These materials were photographed or scanned and I returned to them regularly in the process of tracing the multiple discourses of motherhood, reproduction and feminism that they produce. In addition, I read the memoirs of several feminists activists who were active in the 1960s and 1970s (Rowbotham 2001, Segal 2008, James 2012) while also reading the materials that they had donated to archives, often finding the original documents, leaflets and photographs they had referred to in their memoirs. My methodological approach to the memoirs was to read them as sources of discourse, analysed within the same plane as the materials in the archives.

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<sup>7</sup> The original demands of the Women's Liberation Movement were: equal pay; equal opportunity in education, training and work; free contraception on the National Health Service and free abortion with the woman herself making the decision; provision of 24-hour child care centres (Keyworth 1973).

The critical ethnographic methods I utilised were participant observation, interviews and reflections on past experiences in the field. I utilised participant observation methods to capture the practices and process that produced the contemporary emergence of 24-hour childcare. Participant observation is a well-established set of methods that includes direct observation, participation in the activity of the research group, involvement and engagement in individual and collective discussions and the analysis of the documents produced within or by the group (Flowerdew and Martin 2005:167-8). At its simplest, participant observation involves having or gaining access to the community or group under investigation and observing what happens in that community — “sitting back and watching activities” (Flowerdew and Martin 2005:168) — and recording what is noticed and seen in a field diary. While observation is always theoretically informed and guided, it is crucial to excessively record data and make notes, in so far as it is unclear at the time of observation what details will become later relevant or significant. The objective is to create a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) that makes the context of events clear and that outlines the various roles, relations and practices of the site. The process of participant observation involves analysis of data throughout the research process, questions such as which details are important or significant and what questions to ask or pursue, come from ongoing analysis. As Emerson outlines, the ethnographer’s role is to “identify and communicate the connections between actions and events”, and thus requires theoretical attention throughout the research process (1988:24-5).

I utilised all aspects of participant observation methods, to varying degrees and across four research sites: (1) Spaces of Care Work, (2) In Conversation with Motherhood, (3) The Personal Is Reproductive and (4) Publications and Platforms.

### 1. Spaces of Care Work

The first research site involved me visiting the Russell Hill Road Day Nursery in Purley, south London, on two occasions and interviewing the nursery manager. The nursery provides extended, ‘24-hour’ childcare (overnight care) and is open on Saturdays. In addition, I arranged home visits and interviews

with six childminders who are registered to provide extended, flexible and/or overnight care in the borough of Brent in London. I returned to re-interview Joy, one of the childminders in Brent on two further occasions to record an oral history of her life. My participant observations in both of these sites were put into dialogue with my reflections of previously working part-time for three years in a parent- and staff-run nursery in east London that my own children attended.

## 2. In Conversation with Motherhood

These different encounters with waged care workers in their places of work provided the initial context for a second research site that involved open-structured interviews with mothers in their homes in east London. The conversations were all between one and two hours in length and started with me highlighting the availability of 24-hour care and inviting the participants to respond and to also discuss their children and care arrangements. The interview participants were accessed by posting an outline of the research project and request for interview participants on a popular east London parenting page on social media that has over 5,000 members. I followed up all responses (48), communicating further with respondents about the research, outlining the interview process and attempted to arrange a time to meet for the interview. Of the initial 48 responses, 47 were women and one response was from a man. I was able to arrange 15 face-to-face interviews. All of the interview participants were women with dependent children aged between 5 weeks and 11 years. The interviews were conducted in participants' homes, though in two instances, by request, I met participants in a local café. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions from the interviews were then coded and analysed discursively. The discursive formations of motherhood that were present within the transcriptions were analysed alongside other 'voices' of motherhood including two semi-autobiographical books: *The Secret World of the Working Mother* (2009) written by Fiona Millar and *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality* (2011) written by Rebecca Asher. Both authors have held prominent positions in the media industry in Britain. Asher worked in television news and current affairs and as the Deputy Editor of BBC Radio 4 *Women's Hour*. Millar worked

as a journalist for national newspapers and was a former adviser to Cherie Blair, the partner of British Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

### 3. The Personal Is Reproductive

The third site involved taking intensive notes over the course of two years of my own experiences of giving birth and raising two small children in London without any biological family nearby. In particular, I recorded the seemingly ever-changing care arrangements (childminders, nurseries, babysitters and friends) that my partner and I arranged and negotiated; my regular attendance at the local library's parent and baby sessions; weekly swimming lessons; and play dates with friends and children from school. These encounters and experiences were conducted concurrently alongside my participation in and encounters with the fourth research site, the fortnightly magazine *Nursery World* and the online parenting forum *Mumsnet*<sup>8</sup>.

### 4. Publications and Platforms

My approach to participant observation with regard to *Mumsnet* was somewhat different, as it is an online platform; as such, I utilised "observational netnograph" (Kozinets 2006, 2010) methods. Over a six-month period, I regularly logged into the *Mumsnet* site, scanned the front page, often clicking through to the various campaigns and product promotions. I would then navigate to the Mumsnet Talk Forum, taking notes and copies of certain posts that related to the question of childcare; the tensions between maternal employment and care responsibilities and domestic reproductive labour. *Mumsnet* is an internet-based social networking site that now operates as one of "the premier forums in which motherhood is displayed and consumed" (Thomson et al. 2011:126). *Mumsnet* was created in 2000 by Justine Roberts and Carrie Longton and has developed an extensive online and cultural presence and, according to their website, "is a community and is not a lobby group". Tracey Jensen argues that, through the architecture of the website, *Mumsnet* invites a particular voice from its users, one that "is scaffolded by

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mumsnet.com> (last accessed 1 Feb, 2016)

neoliberal discourses of choice, self-reflexivity and agency” (2013:127). Furthermore, Jensen highlights how *Mumsnet* as an assembled maternal public, “invites mothers into relationships of antagonism, into processes of social distinction and into individualised and fragmented politics of parenting” (Jensen 2013:127).

In contrast to the online platform of *Mumsnet*, *Nursery World* magazine has been published in print form in Britain since 1925 and is a leading fortnightly title for early years education and childcare professionals. I subscribed to *Nursery World* and received fortnightly copies of the magazine in the post. I read all the magazines as they arrived in the post. I then subsequently mapped and analysed the magazine’s content and undertook a critical discourse analysis with the advantage of being able to see how certain issues and problems developed within the childcare sector. *Nursery World* publishes news and analysis of government policy and tracks events and developments in the early years sector. The frequent reference to and inclusion of certain voices in the sector — such as government ministers, nursery managers and national childcare organisations (for example Family and Childcare Trust, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, Preschool Learning Alliance) — work to cohere the ideas and boundaries of how *Nursery World* constructs the early years sector. For example, while some information is included about nannies, considerably more space is dedicated to the issues and policies affecting registered childminders. This is in part because compulsory registration brings childminders within the government’s early years framework, while nannies remain overwhelmingly unregulated. After subscribing to the magazine for over a year, I donated 32 copies to my youngest child’s nursery. The nursery manager was grateful and said: “Oh, that’s great. The staff won’t read much, but they will read *Nursery World*.”

## **2.5 Constraints and limitations**

My research focuses on the processes and practices connected to and organised by motherhood and the interrelation between these processes and the political economy of reproduction. I employ a definition of reproduction that emphasises the materiality of labour while, at the same time,

acknowledging the partiality that such an emphasis produces. In particular, the research does not address in any depth the complex experiences of women who — whether by choice, circumstance or a combination of both — do not have children. In part this limitation is a consequence of my focus on the practices and processes of reproductive labour *vis-à-vis* motherhood. Another limitation of this research is that while it traces some of the experiences of post-war migration to Britain from the former colonies, it emphasises the experiences of Black women, predominately those from the Caribbean. Missing from the research are the voices of migrant women from south Asia and their situated struggles and experiences of migration, racism, labour and family life.

One of the reasons to bring genealogy and ethnography together is that each mode of investigation addresses, or at least partially addresses, the weakness of the other. Genealogies are documents that pose questions in the margins and cracks, paying attention to the discontinuities and small details as much as the connections of history. However, despite a commitment and orientation towards recognising discontinuity within Foucauldian genealogies, there remains a tendency to try to produce a coherent narrative; to tie up loose ends so to speak and to narrate over the conflicts and gaps in history. If genealogies have a tendency towards narrative, then ethnography's focus on the everyday produces uneven, messy accounts that are not easily accommodated by smooth narrative accounts. Ethnographies are experientially driven, in that researchers seek to draw directly from their fieldwork yet, as with any form of writing, constraints influence what is written (Van Maanen 2011). One of the weaknesses of ethnography is an inability to adequately account for social change — whereas genealogical accounts bring a temporal perspective lacking in everyday accounts. One of the limitations that both methodologies share is the boundary construction of research sites. The boundaries and definition of the domestic sphere, motherhood and the home, like that of nature, are political questions: in that their definition is constantly being constructed and deconstructed, as well as being continually and openly resisted.

A limitation that emerged from my archival research was the very constitution of the archive and the question of whose materials and

documents are counted as belonging to 'women's history'. Archives have traditionally been seen as preserving memory — as keepers of the past. Moore *et al.* (2016) argue for an intertwining of the theory and methodology of archival research that avoids romanticising the process and, instead, focuses on the intellectual labour. They emphasise that analysis and interpretation require care and attention to the specificities of the remaining traces. Bringing a genealogical sensibility to archival research necessarily involves remaining attentive to how the archive constructs both the past and the present and how, through the control of selection, description and access, the archive produces certain pasts as authorised and others as forgotten.

The research for this thesis initially set out to make sense of the problem of the different terrains and scales of contemporary reproduction, with a focus on understanding how reproduction functions under neoliberalism. The research problem in its initial articulation focused on some of the conflicts involved in the globalised practices and processes of making and remaking people in neoliberal Britain. I followed this problem through the various aspects of my research, developing a body of, not only theoretical and conceptual tools, but also a methodological approach that brings together critical ethnography and genealogy to examine the interrelation between motherhood and the political economy of reproduction by tracing the emergence of 24-hour childcare in Britain. By placing labour — as a practice and as an embodied set of knowledge — at the centre of the analysis, the combination of both genealogy and ethnography opens up new terrains to conceptualise questions of value, work and reproduction. It is one that consciously avoids essentialised and moralistic analyses concerning children, family, care and domestic work, especially in relation to various aspects of the commodification of reproduction. At the same time, the centrality of labour to the question of reproduction provides a grid within which to examine the connections between the variant scales of reproduction as it operates on the abstract and the everyday.



## CHAPTER THREE

### The Grammar of Reproduction

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*grammar* |'gramər|

*noun*

*the basic elements of an area of knowledge or skill : the grammar of wine.*  
(Oxford Dictionary)

#### 3.1 Inheritances

It is useful to define what is meant by reproduction, so as to be able to articulate what it does, what it produces and also what is not reproductive. This chapter posits a definition of reproduction in which the terms labour and work are utilised interchangeably. The purpose of producing a definition is to provide some conceptual scaffolding to interrogate the interrelation of the subjectivity of motherhood and the political economy of reproduction. By positing a definition of reproduction, the chapter gestures towards a framework in which to understand the contemporary grammar of reproduction in Britain.

The chapter considers several key concepts that both shape and are shaped by reproduction, the first is the articulation of reproduction as *processes and practices of labour*; the second is the Marxist feminist concept of the dual characteristic of reproducing *labour-power*; the third interrogates forms of *waged* reproduction and processes of commodification and the fourth considers the historical relationship between *unwaged* reproductive labour and the wage.

The chapter begins with the definition of reproduction inherited from feminist movements in the 1970s and tests its continuing validity in multiple directions. The chapter focuses on the definition of domestic work as proposed by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, first published in English in 1972. While the text was influential and provocative at the time of its publication, the decision

to utilise it as a departure point genealogically has as much to do with its continued circulation within contemporary feminist debates, reading groups and conferences<sup>9</sup>. The text's publication date in 1972 also intersects with two connected points in history; the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain and the years immediately prior to the election of Margaret Thatcher and the emergence of what is now understood to be neoliberalism.

Beginning with an inheritance is intentional and necessary. In the first instance, it locates the research within a feminist lineage and acknowledges the significant theoretical debt owed to feminists and their contribution to contemporary understandings of capitalism, work and gender relations. To speak of an inheritance is to also speak of wealth and the transmission of value. As a mother, a feminist and researcher, it is without exaggeration to say that I have been produced and sustained by previous feminist's insights, struggles and victories. At the same time, an inheritance suggests that there is also a need to take stock of and account for the transformations and changes that have occurred to reproduction since the 1970s. In testing the continued validity of the definition inherited from past feminist movements, the chapter identifies relevant concepts, moments of change, and continuity, and pays attention to the various processes of commodification that now flow through the family, the work of care, and the domestic sphere.

In testing the validity of the definition produced in the 1970s another line of inquiry opens up, one that necessitate the digging around in older conflicts and histories of the wage-labour system, and tracing the interconnections that exist between waged and unwaged labour in societies dominated by the logics of capitalist social relations. This chapter considers unwaged reproductive labour and how many of the elements that organise reproduction were forged during the long emergence of capitalism in Britain, during the period that Marx refers to in *Capital Vol. 1* as so-called primitive accumulation. By returning to these older histories, another inheritance is located in the traditions of Marxist theory and class struggle.

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<sup>9</sup> Extracts from the original text have been republished by Selma James in *Sex, Race and Class – A Perspective of Winning* (2012) and are available on popular radical online library, <http://www.libcom.org> (last accessed 1 Feb, 2016).

However, to recognise one's debt and the wealth of inherited knowledge is not to perform the role of the dutiful daughter. The term 'political economy of reproduction' is intended to speak to (one of) the silences in Marx's work, specifically his lack of discussion of domestic unwaged labour and the home. In noting this silence, the definition of reproduction that is developed in this chapter continues and expands on debates concerning processes of valorisation of reproductive labour and, specifically, the critique raised by autonomist Marxist feminists concerning the dual characteristic of reproduction (Dalla Costa and James 1972, Federici 1975, 2012, Fortunati 1995, Federici 2004).

### **3.2 Women and the Subversion of the Community: Encounter #2**

By chance, I was in New York City visiting Silvia Federici during the American launch of Selma James' *Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning* (2012). Over the course of the weekend Mariarosa Dalla Costa released a statement responding to certain claims in the book. She was also angry about some of the book's publicity material that claimed that James "coined the word 'unwaged' to describe the caring work women do". I had met both Silvia and Mariarosa a number of years previously and, while I had a sense of some of the feminist critiques of the Wages for Housework campaign, that weekend was the first time that I started to become aware of the considerable political and organisational disagreements that existed inside the campaign. An extract of Mariarosa's statement is included here as a reminder that there is nothing smooth or easy about the processes and practices of history, and as an attempt to make visible some of the conflicts and ruptures that helped to produce the present.

[Extract] – *Statement on "Women and the Subversion of the Community"*

*Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 30 March 2012*

*In her recently published volume, Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning (2012) Selma James makes a number of incorrect statements relative to her collaboration with me and the authorship of The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community that force me to respond, as they distort the history of our cooperation and the beginning of the Wages for Housework Campaign.*

*[...]*

*Let me underline here that what is at stake is not a competition for the authorship of an essay. On the contrary, the question at stake is the historical and political origin of the campaign and struggle for wages for housework, which now appears in Selma James' account as the product of the 'inventiveness' of an individual. This could not be further from the truth.*

*Neither Selma James nor myself 'invented' or discovered the perspective of "Wages for Housework" (WFH) as it is claimed in the book and in the promotional material for its launching in the United States. The demand for wages for housework had been promoted by feminists in Europe and in the United States since at least the beginning of the 20th century [...] An article that appeared in 1912 in the socialist newspaper Chicago Evening World contained an analysis of housework that was very similar to that made by activists in our campaign, pointing out that employers buy two workers for one wage, and that the kind of work a man does determines the work and living conditions of his wife as well. Among male theorists, we can recall Wilhelm Reich who, in The Sexual Revolution written in the 1930s, said that marriage is an institution that exploits women, that unpaid domestic work enables employers to increase their profits, and that the employers can impose low wages precisely because behind the workers there is the free work of their wives.*

*Reich also underlined that even women who have a waged job continued to do the housework as a condition for their marriage to function. Simone de*

*Beauvoir's The Second Sex, written in the 1950s, has pages on the "housework question" that anticipated the analysis we produced over a decade later. Most importantly, the housework question was the central issue in the new feminism that emerged in the early 1970s in Europe and in the US, which marked a break with emancipationism and the demand for "parity". There were different positions on this question, but the problematic arising from the unwaged character of this work, and the fact that housework reproduces labor-power was already acknowledged by various authors, from Betsy Warrior to Peggy Morton and others, prior to the publication of The Power of Women.*

*[...]*

*However, this is not to deny that, in the spirit of cooperation that prevailed at least for a time in the feminist movement, we fully discussed everything we published with each other, and made significant contributions to each other's writings. I should add that another activist participated in our discussions about the article and contributed to it. But at the time nobody suggested that the article should have more than one signature. To be accused now of having taken advantage of this cooperation to place my name on an article predominantly written by Selma James is something I find totally unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of comradely cooperation necessary for building an international movement.*

*[...]*

*It is always very demoralizing when old sisters part ways and I did my best over the last four decades to stay away from polemics about the authorship of this work. However, the comments made in the book that Selma James has now published force me to rectify the claims that she makes.*

### 3.3 The Housework (Debate) is Never Done

As the statement by Mariarosa Dalla Costa makes clear, questions of housework and domestic labour were certainly present in early twentieth-century first wave feminist analysis of 'the Woman Question' (Perkins Gilman 1903, Bondfield 1919, Spring Rice 1939). However, by the late 1960s the question of housework and, specifically, the connection between women's secondary status and dependence on men and the gendered distribution of domestic and care work had become a central question for many in the Women's Liberation Movement. The publication in 1972 of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* is credited as being one of the key texts that sparked off the 'domestic labour debate'<sup>10</sup> (Malos 1980, Vogel 2008, Cleaver 2000).

The theoretical contribution that Dalla Costa and James' formulation of domestic labour provides is that domestic labour produces or at least contributes significantly towards producing labour-power and that "we have to make clear, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value" (Dalla Costa 1975:33). Moreover, "the rule of capital through the wage compels every able bodied person to function, under the law of the division of labour, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital" (Dalla Costa 1975:28).

From the outset there was considerable disagreement within the feminist movement not only with Dalla Costa and James' argument and the demands of the Wages for Housework campaign but more generally about the meaning and role of domestic labour within capitalist societies. However, the actual conceptualisation of domestic labour was relatively uncontested, referred to in the feminist literature of the time as unwaged labour occurring in the domestic private sphere, commonly referred to in articles and campaign

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<sup>10</sup> A comprehensive selection of the various positions and arguments of the 'domestic labour debate' is summarised in *The Politics of Housework* (Malos 1980), for individual articles see (Himmelweit and Mohun 1977, Molyneux 1979, Davidoff 1976, Coulson, Magas, and Wainwright 1975, Dalla Costa and James 1972, Edmond and Fleming 1975, Federici 1975, Fee 1976, Fortunati 1995, Harrison 1973, James 1975b, Barker and Allen 1976, Folbre 1982, Gardiner 1975, 1976, Gerstein 1973, Glazer-Malbin 1976, Kuhn and Wolpe 1978).

materials as 'housework', labour that was overwhelmingly gendered in so far as it was called 'women's work'.

To a large extent the feminist debate about domestic labour was conducted within the language of socialist and Marxist traditions and as such those who contributed to the debate concerned themselves with whether domestic labour was part of a capitalist mode of production or a separate mode of production (Harrison 1973), whether domestic labour was 'unproductive' labour since it did not create surplus value (Himmelweit and Mohun 1977) or 'productive' labour that produces surplus value either indirectly or directly and hence can therefore be thought of as central to capitalist production (Fortunati 1995, Dalla Costa and James 1972). The question of whether domestic labour was subject to, or exempt from, the law of value was also considered and debated by several contributors. For many Marxist feminists, domestic labour was conceived as external to capitalist production (Malos 1980, Weeks 2007).

Margaret Benston (1969), writing a few years earlier than the publication of *Power of Women and Subversion of the Community*, argues that domestic labour in the home constitutes the production of use-values; useful products and services consumed directly by the household, rather than commodity production for market. For Benston, domestic labour, therefore, remains in a 'pre-capitalist' stage of development. She argues that "in a society based on commodity production, [domestic labour] is not usually considered 'real work' since it is outside of trade and the market-place. It is pre-capitalist in a very real sense" (1969 in Malos 1980:11). One critique of the concept of housework and domestic labour as 'pre-capitalist' is that it leaves the household "floating in a historical limbo somewhere quite outside the capitalist economy" (Malos 1980:12). Himmelweit & Mohun (1977) also note that the concept of domestic labour as 'pre-capitalist' does not explain:

how or why such a large proportion of the population should have remained within an otherwise historically obsolete mode of production when it is in the nature of the capitalist mode to subsume all other significant forms of production (1977:19).

For Himmelweit and Mohun, the direct products of domestic labour are not commodities "but are instead use-values, which are not produced for market nor are they exchanged" and they argue that domestic labour is private

production that exists as “a whole sector of production central to, but existing entirely outside, capitalist relations of production” (1977:15). They argue:

domestic labour is performed under relations completely different, both in appearance and reality, from those of capitalist commodity production. The relation is not one of commodity exchange (labour-power consumed in housework does not receive a wage), and is usually seen in emotional rather than economic terms (1977:16).

Himmelweit and Mohun argue that domestic labour does not produce labour-power (cf. Dalla Costa, 1972) instead, it produces many different use-values and the individual consumption of such use-values by household members is what is necessary for the production of labour-power. This distinction of what constitutes labour-power is central to their argument where they posit that “domestic labour is necessary in order that the labourer lives; but it does not produce the commodity labour-power, which is just an attribute of the living individual” (Himmelweit and Mohun 1977:23). For Himmelweit and Mohun labour-power is not a commodity like any other in that it is not produced by labour but by the individual consumption of the labourer, the implication being that it is ‘natural’ attribute.

Writing a number of years after the domestic labour debate had for all intents and purposes exhausted itself, Nancy Folbres (1982) concludes that many feminists and Marxists ended up accepting Himmelweit and Mohun's argument that domestic labour performed in the household was incommensurate with wage labour because it is not subject to the law of value. Folbres concludes that “the debate has ended where it started, excluding non-wage labour, by definition from the value of labour” (1982:319). Similarly, Kathi Weeks summarises the domestic labour debate as “the more orthodox claim that domestic labor was different from and hence part of a distinct circuit outside capitalist production emerged as the dominant line” (2007:236).

Miriam Glucksmann (1995) argues that the domestic labour debate floundered in part because of the inability of contributors to overcome the problem of seeking to commensurate the incommensurable and the “inevitable problems of quantitative attempts to compare inequalities and exchanges between domestic and wage labour” (1995:68). In contrast, Glucksmann's conceptualisation of the “total social organization of labour”



posits a definition of work that encompasses both sectors (household economy and market economy) rather than “viewing them as either independent and autonomous or functional of, and reducible to, each other” (1995:63). In addition, she stresses that it is not the actual activity or task that determines whether or not it constitutes work, instead, what determines whether something is work are the social relations in which it is undertaken.

Himmelweit and Mohun’s (1977) argument that labour-power is merely an attribute of the living individual in many respects ‘won the debate’. However, their conceptualisation of labour seems unable to account for the fact that labour-power as a commodity, is produced and reproduced in considerably differentiated forms and necessarily so, considering the level of specialisation in the labour market, as there is not one standard ‘unit’ of labour-power that can be applied to all areas of waged work. Furthermore, their definition appears to ignore the various skills, attributes and ‘types’ of labour-power that are constructed via gender, class and race subjectivities as well as the processes of training, discipline and education that produce the realities of unskilled, manual, specialist or professional workers. In relation to the racialised discourses of care work, particularly who is considered to be ‘naturally’ good at caring and nurturing, Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (2008) highlights competing yet coexisting discourses of women’s labour market participation and conservative notions of domesticity that are required of female migrants in globalised care markets.

Neither does the conceptualisation of the domestic labour of the housewife as producing a set of use-values that other family members consume capture the complex relations present in the family and domestic sphere. The effects and outcomes of domestic labour and housework are not linear; moving in only one direction from, say, mother to child or wife to husband. In keeping in mind the task of developing a definition, here it seems necessary to destabilise and decentre the discourse of exchange and production so as to also include co-production, self-care and the immeasurability of aspects of care, domestic and housework and the stubborn nature of the practices and processes of making people that defy categorisation and measure.

In doing so, it becomes possible to see that children not only make themselves but at the same time are also involved in a process of producing the parent,

without obscuring the inequalities and uneven distribution of the labour of domestic work. Considering these limitations in the more orthodox feminist definition of domestic work it is useful to return to the alternative definition of domestic labour as advanced by Dalla Costa and James, in which they argue that domestic labour produces or, at least contributes significantly towards producing labour-power and that labour-power is the commodity that is the source of all (surplus) value within the capitalist mode of production (Dalla Costa 1975).

The assertion that all women, irrespective of whether they also worked outside the home, were housewives was a central claim repeated in nearly all the Wages for Housework materials. This position, intended to speak to and include all women (except the very rich), was developed as a political perspective that could provide a common basis from which to inform the struggle for women's liberation. The Wages for Housework campaign literature makes numerous references to the 'different' women that this perspective could speak to, "Black and white, working-class and middle-class, 'supported' and 'unsupported', unwaged and partially waged" (Power of Women Collective 1973). Despite this recognition of the different realities of women, the campaign was often poorly received, with critical questions raised about how the demand for Wages for Housework would be implemented and the ramifications if it was (Rowbotham 1973, Freeman 1973).

One way of reading the criticisms of the Wages for Housework campaign, particularly the claim that all women are housewives, is that, for many women one of the motivating reasons for getting active and involved in the struggle for women's liberation was precisely that they did not want to be just housewives, nor do all the housework, and felt limited by the waged work choices available to them. Writing from an American perspective, Angela Davis criticises the demand and argues that, in the United States, women of colour and especially Black women have been "receiving wages for housework for untold decades" (1983:237). Undoubtedly Dalla Costa and James would have been aware of the racialised histories of paid domestic work and its intersection with slavery and colonialism in the United States, as well as the fact that in the late 1800s in Britain nearly one third of all working

women were employed in waged domestic service (Todd 2009). However, what Davis' comment pointed to are some of the problems that arise from the narrow definition of domestic labour as always-already unwaged labour. The constant presentation of domestic labour as unwaged fails to acknowledge and incorporate the different experiences and meanings that domestic labour has according to one's respective class, gender and race subjectivity and the role and effect that waged work (particularly women's waged domestic, care and sex work) has on the conditions and organisation of the work performed in the domestic sphere.

### **3.4 Shifting Registers from the Domestic to the Reproductive**

In testing the continued validity of the definition posited by Dalla Costa and James concerning the function of domestic labour, I want to draw out and focus on two points. The first is that domestic labour and housework are usefully conceived of as a labour process. The second is the Marxist feminist argument that this labour process has a dual characteristic in so far as it produces and reproduces people and, at the same time, it produces and reproduces the commodity labour-power. To be able to investigate these two points, with the level of complexity that is required, it is necessary to shift registers from the narrower terminology of 'domestic labour' and 'housework' to that of reproduction and reproductive labour. Evelyn Nakano Glenn utilises both the terms social reproduction and reproductive labour in her discussion of the racial divisions present throughout the histories of reproductive labour in the United States. She argues that the term social reproduction has come to be broadly conceived as referring to the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical, beings (Glenn 1992:4).

The shift from using the term domestic labour to reproductive labour is not so much a reflection of changes to housework per se or changes to the institution and ideology of the family but, instead, is a conceptual one that importantly allows for the two forms of reproductive labour; waged and unwaged, to be considered together and separately. It also expands the definition from the narrower focus of housework, usually associated with the physical or manual

tasks of cleaning and cooking of reproduction, to one that also includes affective, emotional and care work. Such a shift disrupts some of the dominant fault lines in the domestic labour debate, in particular, that reproductive labour only referred to unwaged domestic housework and allows for an analysis that moves between the two forms and along the public and private binary, as well as between the market and domestic household spheres.

It is useful to note that, as feminist scholars undertook analysis of contemporary instances of paid reproductive labour in the domestic sphere focusing on servants, cleaners, nannies and elder care workers, many scholars updated previous definitions and frameworks so as to be able to accommodate both the waged and unwaged forms of reproductive labour. Glenn (1992:4) defines reproductive labour as involving mental, emotional and manual labour and asserts that it can also be organised in and outside the household, be waged or unwaged and create exchange value or only use-values and that these different forms of reproductive labour are not mutually exclusive.

For Glenn reproductive labour includes “activities such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishing and appliances, socialising children, providing care and emotional support for adults and maintaining kin and community ties” (1992:1). Glenn’s definition of reproductive labour is useful in that it encompasses considerable breadth; it opens up questions of wealth and value; it highlights the embodied nature of reproductive labour; while at the same time maintains a degree of complexity in the form and location of where such labour takes place.

Reproductive labour also connects to the concept of “intimate labour” as outlined by Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (2010), in which they situate the often discretely examined categories of care, domestic and sex work as sharing common attributes.

Each of these labors forges interdependent relations, represents work assumed to be the unpaid responsibility of women, and, consequently, is usually considered to be a non-market activity or an activity of low economic value that should be done by lower classes or racial outsiders (Boris and Parrenas 2010:2).

The updated and expanded definition of reproductive labour as involving both waged and unwaged forms of labour, inside and outside the domestic sphere addresses the concern of the previous definition of domestic labour as only referring to unwaged labour as unproductive of exchange value. In addition to being able to account for both waged and unwaged forms of labour, the terminology of reproductive labour, as opposed to the previous narrow emphasis of domestic labour, also brings the politics of the body into the framework of analysis.

Carol Wolkowitz argues that much of the analysis of “bodywork”, a term that she defines as employment that “takes the body as its immediate site of labour” (2006:147) has been mainly theorised through notions of emotional labour, as initially developed by Arlie Hochschild (1983). The definition of bodywork as developed by Wolkowitz can also be conceptualised as waged reproductive labour; specifically waged work that produces and reproduces people and their bodies. Wolkowitz is interested in understanding the relative invisibility of bodywork in employment research, pointing to the fact that many see the commodification of the body as an issue concerning consumption, and thereby the subsequent focus on discourses of consumers obscures “the social relations within which good and services are produced” (2006:147).

Wolkowitz’s critique of the identification of emotional labour as a distinct input, separate from the performance of physical tasks, can be extended to the definition of reproductive labour and to labour outside of the employment context, namely unwaged labour. She argues that such a split between emotional, caring labour and that of physical and manual labour inadvertently replicates the Cartesian mind-body dualism. She makes the further point that, by identifying emotional work as a separate component of care, one that is often more valued and rewarded higher status and pay, our understanding of physical care of the body is “concomitantly narrowed and identified with mindlessness or mechanical activity” (2006:147). The conceptualisation of manual, physical work as different and therefore separate from the more desirable, valued and skilled emotional and affective aspects of reproduction can be argued to contribute to the devaluing of certain aspects of reproduction, in particular, the dirty, manual and so-called

unskilled work of cleaning and domestic maintenance; work that Wolkowitz characterises as, not only saturated with gender, but also race.

Contemporary definitions of reproductive labour necessarily need to expand to include waged and unwaged labour and to include both the manual, physical tasks of cleaning and cooking, as well as the inclusion of care, emotional and affective labours. The inclusion of 'care work', as an aspect of reproductive work is useful in mapping some of the boundaries of reproduction. Unpacking the definition of reproductive work as proposed by Glenn (1992) a little more, brings into the frame sex; conception; pregnancy; birth as well as caring, sexualised, and emotional labours. In addition there is the need to add "the un-named, unnameable labour required to anticipate, prevent or resolve crises [and] keep up good relations with kin and neighbours" (Barbagallo and Federici 2012:3).

At this point, it is necessary to stress that reproduction is more than just a list of tasks we do and don't do and that the processes and practices of reproductive labour are considerably uneven. Who it is that does the work of reproduction, how it is defined and valued, how it is performed, and if it is paid is one part of this unevenness. Where this work occurs is also part of the unstable ground of reproduction. At the same time, the different forms of unwaged and waged that reproductive labour involves do not map neatly onto the binary of private or public. In part, this is the result of the competing yet coexisting meanings of the 'public'. To list just three, firstly 'in public' can be understood to be in view of the public understood as other individuals. Secondly, 'in public' can be in view of and regulated by the state or thirdly, the meaning of 'public' as that which is provided by the state.

In spite of this messiness and the inability to fix bodies and labour into neat categories, the binaries of private and public continue to organise and structure much of the work of reproduction. Within both spheres, which can broadly be conceived of as the (domestic) private sphere and the (market) public sphere (Davidoff and Hall 1987), both waged and unwaged reproductive labour take place. Another division that structures the organisation of reproduction is the binary of the market and state. While reproduction is often thought of as occurring in the home it can equally be argued to occur on the street, in a training centre or hospital. Whether these

activities are carried out by the state, a company, a community organisation, a non-government organisation or within the family is the result of a long history of changes, regulation, conflicts and struggle. In other words, there is nothing 'natural' or 'fixed' about how we reproduce others and ourselves.

The unevenness in the meaning, status and value afforded to reproductive labour when it takes place in different spheres and in different forms can be traced through the various policies, debates and regulations. In the instance of caring for children, the same or very similar labour practices and processes of; playing with, caring about, entertaining, educating, disciplining, cleaning up after, feeding, soothing and washing the face and sticky fingers of a child occurs in numerous locations in both the private and public spheres. In the day nursery or childcare centre, which could be run by the state, for profit or not for profit, those that perform the work of childcare are clearly recognisable as workers, in that they receive wages and are governed by employment regulations and laws. In the case of private for profit nurseries, the workers also produce profit for the company that run the service.

When we shift our analysis to the domestic private sphere there are numerous childcare workers who work in the home. For instance, childminders receive wages to look after other people's children in their own home. They are overwhelmingly self-employed women and have a relative degree of autonomy and control over the hours they work and how many children they look after. Nannies, *au pairs* and babysitters all receive wages for looking after other people's children and this work usually takes place in the home of the child. Their residential status differs, with *au pairs* living in and nannies being both live-in and now, more commonly, live out. As a result of specific childcare requirements that many affluent households have (such as nannies being available for 12 hours per day, joining the family on overseas holidays or having specialist language skills) some nanny positions in global cities like London can attract relatively high wages.

However in the case of the parent, say the child's mother who looks after her child on a daily basis and is responsible for the child's care both day and night and performs all of, if not more of the work of a nanny, nursery worker or *au pair*, the mother does not receive a wage and in fact is deemed to be 'out of work' or 'economically inactive'. In the case of accessing state benefits, she

is classified as unemployed. The disparity in the conditions and the value afforded to these different sites of labour, reinforces Gluckmann's (1995) argument that it is not the actual activity but the social relations in which such activity occurs that determines whether something is work.

At the same time, the definition of reproduction as a labour process is not to claim that all instances of such labour are the 'same'. Of course there are many important differences between labour processes that are organised through the wage relation and those that are not. However, the framing of reproduction as a labour process allows for a critical analysis of the material practices and processes involved and helps to denaturalise our familiarity with such concepts. An emphasis on analysis that works to denaturalise our understanding of reproduction is useful, indeed crucial, given the repetition and everydayness of activities and tasks involved in the labour of reproduction. Beyond the theoretical implications, the assertion that the tasks, activities and knowledge of reproduction are a labour process, one that needs to be revalued has been a long-standing political demand of many feminists and labour rights activists.

Connected to the definition of reproduction as a labour process is the Marxist feminist argument that, at the same time that reproductive labour produces and reproduces people, it also produces and reproduces the commodity labour-power — a process which is referred to as the "dual characteristic of reproduction" (Federici 2012). In positing reproduction as possessing a duality, it becomes possible to both revalue reproduction and, at the same time, identify the practices and processes of reproduction as implicated and foundational in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. The definition of reproduction developed in this chapter draws on a wide range of feminist literature regarding domestic and reproductive work spanning 40 years. However, what sets the definition in this chapter apart from much of the feminist theory concerning reproduction is its emphasis on the dual characteristic of reproduction. The conceptualisation of reproduction as encompassing a duality, or framed another way, as possessing a contradiction is an emphasis inherited from the autonomous feminist Marxist tradition, in particular, the work of Silvia Federici (2004, 2012) Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1975, 1995) Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) and Maria Mies (1998).



In so far as the work of reproduction involves working on bodies and relationships, it involves producing and maintaining people. The dual characteristic of reproduction draws attention to the tensions and contradictions at the centre of the processes and practices of reproduction; a tension that is directly related to what reproduction does within capitalism and how it operates. In societies dominated by capitalist social relations, people are reproduced as workers but also, at the same time, they are reproduced as people whose lives, desires and capabilities exceed the role of worker. People are more than their economic role; they are irreducible to it. People struggle, are involved in conflict and, at times, are capable of resistance. In this way reproductive labour can be said to have two functions: it both maintains capitalism in that it produces the most important commodity of all — labour-power and, at the same time, reproductive labour has the potential to undermine the smooth flow of accumulation of profit, by producing subjects who can and do resist the rule of capitalism.

Placing an emphasis on the role and function the work we do in the making and remaking of people and workers enables us to see the conflicts, struggles and contradictions that make reproduction and reproductive labour what it is today. Katz argues that social reproduction “encompasses the reproduction of the labor force at a certain (and fluid) level of differentiation and expertise”, and, importantly, that “this differentiated and skilled labor force is socially constituted” (2001: 711). By locating the struggles involved in processes of reproduction and bringing them to the centre of our analysis, we are able to unravel individual stories and start to see the connections and strategies that produce the institutions and ideologies of domesticity, the family and home.

### **3.5 The Rise and Rise of Waged Reproductive Work**

The definition of reproduction unfolding in this chapter has so far traced the contours of reproduction as a labour process. I have argued that reproduction involves a labour process that is structured by a dual characteristic. Framing this in another way, I would highlight the contradictory function that reproduction has within capitalism; where reproductive labour both produces

human beings and, at the same time, produces the commodity labour-power. Encompassed within this process are two forms of labour — unwaged and waged reproductive labour. Setting aside the unwaged form of reproduction for a moment, what of the other form, that of waged reproductive labour? In this iteration, reproductive labour appears in its commodified form, structured by relations between those who are employed, as waged workers and those who purchase and consume, as customers, clients or patients. In some instances, those who are consumers are also employers, directly commanding the labour of workers, for example parents who employ a nanny, or a professional couple who employ a cleaner. In other instances the production and consumption of commodified reproductive labour is mediated via state institutions, in Britain the National Health Service (NHS) would be one example, as would the state education system.

Another instance, and one that is increasingly prevalent is the organisation of reproductive labour via profit-making companies who provide specific services and ‘experiences’. In developing a definition of reproduction that reflects the contemporary organisation of gendered and racialised class subjects, it is the waged form that appears to increasingly dominate. The histories of waged reproductive labour have developed concurrently with that of unwaged reproductive labour and the wage labour system more generally. If the history of unwaged reproductive labour is the history of how gender was transformed and ‘put to work’ in the emergence of capitalism then, in similar and connected ways, the history of waged reproductive labour tells the story of how race and migration intersect with gender and class formations. From the outset it is important to note that there is nothing ‘new’ about the existence of waged reproductive work. Employing other people to do various aspects of domestic and reproductive labour has a long history in Britain, notably large numbers of young women were employed as domestic servants in the 1800s and early 1900s. To the gendered history of domestic service it is also necessary to also note the long history of women and men selling sex and sexual services (Agustin 2007). The creation of the British welfare state in the post-war era considerably expanded waged reproductive work, with the National Health Service and other social services. Significantly, the post-war period saw some aspects of previously privatised reproduction altered and reorganised via state institutions, where limited

aspects were de-privatised but, importantly, not commodified via market relations.

In *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, Bridget Anderson argues that “the paid domestic worker, even when she does the same tasks as the wife/daughter/mother, is differently constructed” (2000:2). She stresses that the domestic worker “whether ‘cleaner’, ‘nanny’ or ‘servant’, is fulfilling a role and crucial to that role is her reproduction of the female employer’s status (middle-class, non-labourer, clean) in contrast to herself (worker, degraded, dirty)” (Anderson 2000:2). In her definition of paid domestic work, she argues that paid domestic workers are not selling their labour-power but are, in fact, selling their ‘personhood’. It is not entirely clear whether she is arguing that paid domestic workers are selling their personhood once and for all, such that it becomes another’s property, and thus is a form of chattel slavery or, alternatively, only for a limited period of time in the way that one usually sells one’s labour-power. She argues that “the migrant domestic worker slips into the analytical space between body as personhood and body as property” (2000:3). This process of slippage occurs because, according to Anderson, domestic workers are engaged in payment for care work. It is the inclusion of care into the matrix of domestic work that Anderson argues blurs the distinction between unfree and free labour relations of domestic paid work. Due to her narrow focus on paid domestic work in the home, it is unclear from her argument whether she considers other instances of care work, for example workers employed outside the domestic sphere, such as nurses, childcare workers or therapists, to also be selling their personhood as opposed to their labour-power.

One of the other effects of framing research so that only instances of waged reproductive labour in the domestic private sphere of the home are considered, is that the narrative of (some) middle- and upper-class families and their strategies and choices in distributing reproductive labour have a tendency to become generalised and come to stand in for all households. To be sure, employing a cleaner or nanny and particularly a migrant woman to do this work is now a more common experience for British households than in previous decades, such as the 1970s or even 1980s. However, the reality of many working-class and lower middle-class households is that this

experience remains culturally and economically unattainable, if it is desired at all.

My critique of the framing of waged domestic labour as essentially a quarrel amongst women —as Anderson’s argument sets it up — is that it obscures the question of how the proliferation and increase of commodified forms of reproduction have occurred. The exclusive focus on domestic work in private homes runs the risk of obscuring the interconnected ways that cities like London have “become almost wholly reliant on foreign-born workers to do the city’s ‘bottom-end’ jobs” (Wills et al. 2010) and that the racialised and gendered organisation of migrant labour-market is structured, maintained and produced by globalised neoliberalism.

In addition, there is a tendency in much of the literature concerning paid domestic work to reinforce the degraded and devalued status of reproductive work, especially when judged against the ‘benefits’ and freedom of women’s work outside the home. To be able to revalue reproduction and, at the same time identify what is currently wrong with its organisation, it is necessary to analyse both waged and unwaged reproductive labour so as to be able to develop a better understanding of the effects and consequences of the marketisation and commodification of various aspects of reproduction without resorting to an essentialised notion of the ‘non-commodity’ form as inherently good or harm-free. By analysing reproductive labour in both its waged and unwaged forms, the continuing and necessary role of unwaged reproductive labour (as opposed to commodified reproductive labour) for neoliberalism can also be interrogated.

Another consequence of analysing the proliferation of commodified forms of reproduction via the narrow lens of waged domestic work in the private home is that a narrative emerges that rehearses many of the debates and anxieties of the ‘Servant Problem’ that circulated within the Victorian and Edwardian middle-class and the employment of domestic and care workers of the 1800s and early 1900s (Schwartz 2015). In much of the contemporary feminist analysis of domestic work, the “ideal housewife” (McClintock 1995) of the Victorian era returns remixed and updated in the twenty-first century as either lazy and racist and/or driven by ambition to succeed and possessing a new found freedom (freedom expressed as her career outside the home); her

ambition to have a career and desire for freedom from the home is so much so that she is willing to exploit another woman to achieve success. That the Victorian housewife and her servants dance in the shadows of much of the contemporary literature discussing waged reproductive work is, in part, due to the function of reproduction within capitalism— a function and organisation that can be traced through the (long) emergence of industrial capitalism in Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the following section, I investigate the unwaged form of reproduction and focus on the interrelated development of unwaged reproductive labour and the wage labour system and trace the devaluation and naturalisation of unwaged reproductive labour with capitalism.

### **3.6 The Great Domestic Confinement**

'Happy indeed,' exclaims Mr Baker, the factory inspector, in his official report, 'happy indeed will it be for the manufacturing districts of England, when every married woman having a family is prohibited from working in any textile works at all. (Marx 1976[1867]:522)

In this final section, unwaged reproductive labour is investigated as a specific historical formation; one that emerged and is maintained through the specific social relations of capitalism and the development of the wage-labour system. Indeed the historicity of the unwaged form of reproduction operates much like a family secret — a secret that needs to be concealed to keep things running smoothly. The following section interrogates the interdependent histories of the waged labour system and the devaluation and gendering of unwaged reproductive labour, paying particular attention to processes of separation and differentiation and the considerable conflicts and struggles that shaped the emergence of capitalist social relations in Britain starting in the mid-sixteenth century through to the end of the nineteenth century.

The foregrounding of the separation of production from reproduction is necessary when we consider that, in feudal societies, the household functioned as a unit where production and reproduction were unified. While

not all production nor reproduction occurred exclusively within the confines of the feudal peasant house, it is useful to consider that “in the pre-industrial economy based on household production, home and commerce, social reproduction and production, women and men, children and adults, were located in the same world of daily experience” (Laslett and Brenner 1989:386). This ‘same world of daily experience’ is contextualised in so far as “in most pre-capitalist societies, the configuration of feudal social relations means that it is not the individual peasant, but the peasant household that constitutes the basic unit of production as well as the basic unit of exploitation” (LeBaron 2010:893). Ann Oakley makes the argument that “housework as a separate activity did not exist” and that there was no differentiation between cooking, eating and sittings rooms (1976a:23). She notes that the pre-industrial home was a relatively simple design and the “history of domestic architecture is the history of evolution of family life: the bedroom, the kitchen, the drawing room, and the corridor are all relatively recent innovations” (Oakley 1976a:23).

While being cautious not to oversimplifying the unity of production and reproduction that existed in feudal societies (Molyneux 1979), it is possible to argue that the development and growth of capitalist production fundamentally undermined and transformed the previous relations that were present between production and reproduction. Susan Himmelweit (1983) argues that the changes brought about by the introduction of the wage-labour system in Britain changed the previous organisation of production, transforming gender relations and relations between children and adults and the spatiality of labour.

With production moved out of the household or transformed within it, the first separation occurred: that of production from reproduction. This separation can be thought of as one of the fundamental characteristics of capitalist social relations. Moreover, it can be mapped onto the contours that distinguish waged work from unwaged work. The basis of the separation was not just spatial (in terms of where things happened) but also political and material, in that control over production was alienated and involved the dispossession of the household and community of their means of material reproduction. The transformations that occurred to both the household and to

women's social position and the gendering of the labour processes of production and reproduction in the transition from feudalism to capitalism can be usefully investigated through the textiles industry. Oakley argues that before industrialisation, "agriculture and textiles were the chief occupations of the British people" (1976a:14). In addition, the textile industry, involving both production in Britain and on the slave plantations in the colonies, was one of the major engines of innovation and accumulation prior to and during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution (Himmelweit 1983, Robinson 2000, Federici 2004).

Before the factory system and industrialisation, the work of spinning had traditionally been assigned to women when production took place in the feudal household. "The mother was responsible for preparatory processes; in general she spun, taught the daughters how to spin, and allocated the picking, cleaning, drying, carding etc. among the children" (Smelser 1959 cited in Oakley 1976a). However the mechanisation process that occurred with the introduction of the factory system was accompanied by a redefinition of spinning as skilled, heavy work and eventually men took over this work in the factories. Due to the complexity and amount of workers required to operate the ever-larger spinning machines, the full-time wage covered the (now) male worker and his assistants — who were usually his family. Himmelweit (1983) argues that the creation of spinning work as male work was a process of struggle, in that the craft unions excluded all but the close male relatives of spinners from training. Furthermore that the result of excluding women and male non-relatives meant that the male spinners were able to restrict competition in the labour market, maintain higher wages and also retain the right to employ their own wives and children as subcontractors (Himmelweit 1983).

In the case of weaving, the opposite process of gendering and valuation occurred as weaving traditionally had been men's work in the pre-industrial household production process. Himmelweit (1983) argues that, due to the slower introduction of machines for weaving and its interrelated processes of production with spinning, when the work of weaving did enter the factory system it not only broke the craft union of (male) weavers but was accompanied by a processes of devaluation, which saw the now less-skilled

work of weaving become women's work. Moreover she notes that as the factory system spread from cotton to all other forms of manufacture it was women and children who were employed in the first stages of most industries. The effect of which was to break the relative positions of power of the craft unions and to lower (male) working conditions with the use of female labour.

The transformations that occurred to both production and reproduction with the introduction of wage-labour highlights the gendered nature of class formation and the way sexual difference always influenced class belonging (Davidoff and Hall 1987:29). Ellen Malos makes the important point that in nineteenth century Britain it was both liberal reformers and working-class organisations that agitated for reforms to industrial production. They were driven by the belief that if industrialisation were to continue "the working-class would be unable to reproduce itself adequately" (Malos 1980:17). Malos argues, alongside numerous other British feminist historians, that the belief in the unsustainability of industrialisation set in motion a series of wide ranging, interlocking and reinforcing reforms of which the overall effect "was to restore the family as the centre in which the maintenance of the working-class and the reproduction and socialisation of their children took place" (1980:17). Furthermore the restoration of the family was structured by the belief that the organisation of reproduction should reflect, as much as possible, the Victorian middle-class discourse of a "wife whose sole function lay inside the home and family" (Malos 1980:17).

The desire of both liberal reformers and working-class organisations for reforms to industrialisation<sup>11</sup> can be understood in so far as, in the early years of capitalist production, relations between men, women and children were restructured and, as a result of this reorganisation and the destruction of previous social relations, the existence of the working family as the key site for the reproduction of labour-power was brought into crisis (Fortunati 1995:172). This crisis of the reproduction of labour-power, according to Fortunati, forced the state to intervene into the sphere of production with

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<sup>11</sup> See Marx's discussion of the *Factory Acts 1833-1864* in *Capital Vol. 1* Chapter Ten.



'protective' legislation restricting women and children's employment in the factories, in effect, saving capitalism from destroying itself through the consumption of female and child labour and the subsequent destruction of the conditions of reproduction.

Marx outlines some of the contradictions faced by working mothers in the nineteenth century in a footnote in Chapter 15 of *Capital Vol. 1*, experiences that bear a striking resemblance to contemporary employment conditions for many women. Marx makes the interesting point that an abundance of material and facts "which are concealed by official Political Economy" can be found in such documents as the *Reports of the Inspectors of Factories and Reports of Public Health*. It is from these reports that we learn that

Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers confiscated by capital, must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence, the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money. The cost of production of the working-class family therefore increases, and balances its greater income (Marx 1976[1867]:518).

What is striking about this insight is that it clearly expresses the tension between the necessary labour required to reproduce household members (some of which cannot be entirely suppressed) and that time spent engaging in waged work which does not necessarily increase a household's wealth. Without the unwaged work of reproduction the cost of the "production of the working-class family" in fact increases. Apart from this crucial insight tucked away in a footnote, the labour processes undertaken by the so-called 'non-working' housewife, including the work of transforming the subsistence commodity basket into goods and services necessary for daily life disappears in much of Marx's analysis in *Capital Vol. 1*. The naturalisation of reproduction in the private domestic realm conceals the essential function that reproductive labour has in the process of capitalist accumulation and it obscures the important dynamics that externalise the costs of reproducing labour-power that would otherwise have had to be covered by the capitalist (via the wage) or at least by the state (Mies 1998).

In his discussion of the exploitation of women and children in the factories of England during the industrial revolution, Marx explicitly refers to the value of labour-power as being determined “not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also by that necessary to maintain his family” (1976[1867]:518). This conception of the value of labour-power as corresponding to the means of subsistence necessary to not only reproduce the adult (male) worker, but also his wife and children have lead feminist scholars such as Maria Mies (1998) to conclude that Marx’s analysis of the value of labour-power is based on the worker having a ‘non-working’ housewife. She formulates the gendered processes of the transition to capitalism as being one in which the creation of the unwaged housewife was contingent upon the creation of the wage-earner (Mies 1998:110). The process of creating and separating waged (male) and unwaged (female) workers into ‘separate spheres’ of work and influence was differentiated and uneven in its development within the working-class. This unevenness was, in part, due to the necessity within working-class families for women to work for wage. In the mid-nineteenth century women’s waged work was certainly necessary, with one third of women responsible for supporting their families however much of this waged work was performed inside the home and in many ways made invisible (Himmelweit 1983).

In mapping the connections between the restoration of the family as the central site of the maintenance of the working-class and socialisation of children, and that of unwaged reproductive labour, the variability of family forms must also be stressed. There is no essential ‘family’ but always ‘families’ and it is also important to make clear the differentiation of family and household (Davidoff and Hall 1987:31). Davidoff and Hall remind us that in the early-eighteenth century no word existed which meant ‘only kin’ within a household, with the “frequent inclusion of servants, lodgers, visitors, pupils, shopmen or unrelated children as household members” (1987:31). As such, far from being the natural state of things, or indeed being a pre-capitalist formation, the family comprised solely of heterosexual married parents and their biological children had to be created. In effect the family was produced, managed and actually forced upon the recently created working-class, a fact that is testament to the level of resistance and struggle that the working-class population conducted against the conditions, not only

of waged work, but also of the reorganisation of the household prior to and during the early stages of industrialisation.

As a part of the various mechanisms of accumulation that occurred prior to capitalism's emergence, the domestic sphere and 'domesticity' can be seen as being in motion, as spaces that were in the process of being produced and transformed. The significance of the domestic sphere was such that by the eighteenth and nineteenth century ideas about the home, the family and the domestic had become so central to thinking about how society was and should be organised that feminist historians have argued it constituted a 'domestic ideology' (Davidoff and Hall 1987). Davidoff and Hall argue that the ideology of domesticity unified a middle-class divided by economic interests, region, politics and religion. Furthermore, they posit that the domestic ideology that came to prevail in England encompassed the notion of 'separate spheres', whereby men occupied, or were thought to occupy, the public world of work and politics and women the private or domestic realm of the home and family.

The idea of 'separate spheres' and 'domestic ideology' that Davidoff and Hall (Davidoff and Hall 1987) argue designated men and women into the public and private realm respectively has been subjected to extensive revision and critique by historians. In particular, Amanda Vickery (1998) has argued against the idea that separate spheres for men and women emerged with the industrial revolution, instead positing that women were increasingly active within the public sphere from the late-eighteenth century onwards. However, many historians continue to defend the idea of domestic ideology as a useful way of describing certain gendered processes that occurred during, and were distinct to, the nineteenth century and hence also occurred during the emergence of industrial capitalism. Anne Summers (2000) has reasserted the need for a 'common sense' understanding of separate spheres and argues that the continued importance of separate spheres and domestic ideology is not to claim that women were permitted only to be wives and mothers, but that the way in which they and others perceived their work was fundamentally structured according to their gender.

Though a significant minority were employed in professions—as writers, dressmakers, schoolteachers, for example, the majority of married women in

middle-class households in the nineteenth century did not work for wages outside the home. It was in this period that motherhood came almost exclusively to define middle-class women's activities, with the 'Cult of True Womanhood' being both constructed by and imposed upon middle-class women. Anne McClintock's powerful work *Imperial Leather* draws analogies between the "denial of the value of women's domestic work in the industrial metropolis and the devaluing of colonised labour in the cultures coming under violent imperial rule" (1995:138). McClintock argues that the nineteenth century was a century obsessed with women's work and a period that also saw the birth of the supposedly idle middle-class housewife.

McClintock persuasively argues that 'housewifery became a career in vanishing acts. A wife's vocation was not only to create a clean and productive family but also to ensure the skilled erasure of every sign of her work' (McClintock 1995:162). Quite apart from the spectacle of leisure and idleness that this performance made possible was the fundamental devaluing and concealment of women's work (McClintock 1995:162). Inside Victorian middle-class homes the intersection of gender and class relations produced differentiated experiences of the devaluing of domestic work, within which McClintock argues "the most damaging burden of the erasure of domestic labor fell on servants" (1995:163). She argues that female domestic servants thus became the embodiment of a central contradiction with modern industrial capitalism, where "the separation of the private from the public was achieved only by paying working-class women for domestic work that wives were supposed to perform for free" (McClintock 1995:164). Furthermore, it was the waged reproductive work of servants that was crucial and indispensable in the process of "transforming wives' labor power into their husbands' political power" (1995:164).

The various processes that constructed and defined reproductive activities as 'women's work' and, conversely, devalued and constructed women's other employment to that of 'mere' domestic labour or housekeeping occurred at a time when women faced increased restrictions in areas of traditional female employment, for example ale brewing and midwifery. The eighteenth century was a period in which many proletarian women increasingly struggled to find work other than in low status jobs leading to a concentration of women

working in low paid jobs, in particular, as domestic servants. So much so that domestic service by the late-nineteenth century included one third of the paid female work-force (Todd 2009). It was these changes in the material conditions and availability of women's paid work that helped to naturalise the discourse and reality that a woman's true vocation was marriage and domestic work within the family and that she was unable to support herself financially.

The idea of men and women occupying different spheres of work and influence was both a response to, and a contributing factor in, the reorganisation of reproduction that occurred with the rise of capitalism. In addition, important changes in law and governance, as well as new moral discourses, emerged to ensure the reproduction of the working-class. Women's knowledge and relative control of procreation was ruptured and lost with their persecution and the witch-trials and the reconfiguration of what constituted a reproductive crime was evident in the criminalisation of both abortion and infanticide (Federici 2004, Ehrenreich and English 1973, Oakley 1976b). The reorganisation of women's reproductive labour corresponded with the designation of the nuclear family as the key site for the reproduction of labour-power, promoted by the extension of the right to marriage to those without property (Mies 1998) and new policies and discourses that shaped sexuality—namely the normalisation of monogamy and criminalisation of adultery.

This chapter has outlined a definition of reproduction; one that began with an inherited definition from previous feminist debates about domestic work in the 1970s. The definition of reproduction as discussed in this chapter has also necessarily discussed the development and transformation to gender relations, the family and the domestic sphere. One of the central mechanisms in the development of unwaged reproduction has been the separation of productive and reproductive activities and the creation of the separate spheres of work and home. In addition, the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, with the overwhelming responsibility for the reproduction of people and the commodity labour-power can be argued to be connected to the gendered relations of the wage system.

The crisis of reproduction that emerged with the rise of industrial capitalism consisted of multiple elements. There was the biological inability of women, due to overwork and poor working conditions, to reproduce healthy children who would grow to be the next generation of workers. Of the children who were born, many did not survive due to the social conditions that prevented their care, or they themselves were victims of over-work and the lack of the means of subsistence. In addition, the crisis of reproduction was produced and managed within a bourgeois ideology that increasingly constructed women and men as different and possessing different virtues. However, as Fortunati argues, it is not enough to simply confront this 'biological' crisis within the terms of a naturalised motherhood. Rather, motherhood itself must be considered an historical category. A rereading of Marx's discussion of the crisis of reproduction from the perspective of motherhood as an historical category reveals that the breakdown in the biological reproduction of the working-class precipitated a second discursive crisis — a crisis born from the contradictions that emerged between discourses of motherhood and the actuality of women's labour.

The gendered and racialised processes of accumulation that were on the one hand, a concentration of exploitable workers and capital and, on the other, the accumulation of differences and division within the working-class were fundamental for the capitalist formations of wage labour, the family and the domestic sphere and for commodity production. The crisis of reproduction that occurred with the rise of industrial capitalism was effectively and productively resolved with the transformation of the social position of women into the role of the 'non-working' housewife. Despite the multiple contradictions that this presented for working-class women, the figure of the unwaged dependent housewife became central to constructions of gender, race and class within capitalist societies. The reproductive work that housewives were responsible for underwent a fundamental process of transformation: it vanished. Of course, the very real and material work of reproduction did not disappear but the economic, political and social value of reproductive work vanished within the value calculus of industrial capitalist accumulation and with it, so did much of women's social, political and economic power.

To conceive of reproduction is to experience a profound and necessary entanglement with other bodies and with labour. There is a sense of, not only tripping over the connections, but of scratching the surface and disrupting the appearance of 'common sense' which, in turn, reveals multiple histories and bodies that were not apparent at first glance. The definition of reproductive labour as outlined provides a framework to understand the contemporary grammar of reproduction in Britain today and assists in efforts to understand how such practices and processes have come to be experienced, imagined and produced. The grammar of reproduction as explored in this chapter has investigated the forms of both waged and unwaged reproductive labour and the various spheres where such work takes place. The continued validity of the definition of domestic labour as proposed by Dalla Costa and James has been assessed and, in proposing to shift registers from the domestic to the reproductive, it draws on the definition of reproduction as posited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992). The shift in definition from domestic work conceived as always-already unwaged, to one which encompasses both waged and unwaged instances of reproductive labour enables the processes of commodification and the state funding and organisation of reproduction to also be interrogated. The focus of the next chapter is on the development, provision and regulation of the waged reproductive labour of childcare and its interrelation with the maintenance of gender roles, the subjectivity of motherhood and the restructuring of the workforce under neoliberalism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Never Ending Story of Care and Work

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#### 4.1 24-hour Childcare: Encounter# 4

In June 2012 the Russell Hill Road Day Nursery in Purley, South London opened its doors, registered to provide early years care for children aged from six months to five years. However, unlike most other childcare services, Russell Hill is registered to provide overnight care for up to 12 children per night. The nursery's overnight services run from 7pm-7am that combined with the daytime care from 7am-7pm, means, in effect, that the nursery provides 24-hour childcare. The nursery manager, Sam explains "the nursery is also open on Saturdays, which is very popular with our parents". In her office there are four screens that have live images from CCTV cameras located on all entrances and gates of the nursery.

In 2002, Purley was listed as Britain's most affluent suburb and has remained one of the richest suburbs in Britain due to its green outer-London location and a commute time of less than 30 minutes to central London, as well as its large houses and exclusive gated estates. Sam explains that parents who use Russell Hill have "jobs that are demanding" and that "parents are working more hours, on weekends, travelling to and from London and working late." While some of nursery's parents are single parents and shift-workers, mostly nurses, "many of our parents are in the medical profession, doctors, dentists and many work in London, in the City".



There are 92 children registered at Russell Hill and “about half do a full day, from 7am - 7pm”. There are 15 staff employed, all of them women. Parents book in for the overnight care service when they need it on an *ad hoc* basis. Sam says that “the children are excited to stay at nursery, it’s like a sleepover”. There is a dedicated and separate sleep room upstairs and “we use the same routine which parents follow at home”. Unlike at home, the two members of staff who are on the overnight shift are required to stay awake for their shift.

Russell Hill Nursery is not an isolated case of extended, flexible and overnight childcare. In 2014, on the other side of London, in the northwest, Brent Council launched a new flexible childcare scheme that includes overnight and extended hours care provided by registered childminders. Promotional materials for the new flexible childminding service state that the Council “introduced a new service to help people who work irregular hours even if that means during the weekend or overnight”. Joy is one of the childminders who registered with Brent Council to provide flexible and extended hours care. She regularly looks after a little boy from 5pm until 9.30pm whose parents shift-work in retail.

The Borough of Brent where Joy lives and works as a childminder is considered ethnically diverse; in the 2011 Census those from South Asian backgrounds comprised 33 percent of the borough’s population and those from African and Caribbean backgrounds about 19 percent. Brent also has the highest proportion of Irish residents in mainland Britain, making up 4 percent of borough residents. In sharp contrast to the average £53,900 household incomes in Purley, ONS data from 2011-2013 shows that 33 percent of Brent residents are paid less than the London Living Wage, which means, working full-time, they earn less than £17,850 per year.

## 4.2 Home and Work

Growing children's nursery market now worth £4.9bn (Nursery World 2014a:4)

This chapter begins at the provision of 24-hour childcare and considers why any parent would need the option of extended, flexible or overnight care for their child. The emergence of 24-hour childcare in Britain can be argued to have been produced by and, at the same time, can be thought of as producing significant transformations in gender relations. However, in so far as the experiences and practices of gender have been transformed through the expansion and development of formalised care, so too have class and race relations. Considered in such a way, the emergence of 24-hour childcare opens up a series of interlocking questions about how some women are produced as being in need of more childcare choices, while others are produced as those who do the work of care and how, conversely, looking after your own child continues to not be considered 'real' work. The focus of the need of some parents for flexible and extended childcare, as well as its provision provides an opportunity to further examine some of the labour processes of reproduction as initially outlined in Chapter Three.

In many ways it appears relatively uncontroversial to posit that the emergence of 24-hour childcare in Britain signals both the ever-increasing reality of women's waged work under neoliberalism and the significant expansion of the formal childcare sector in the last 20 years. Equally, the development of 24-hour childcare suggests that a considerable reorganisation of the reproductive labour of care work has occurred. However, women's access to decent, well-paid and meaningful waged work has been highly uneven; to such an extent that women's increased participation in the labour market has in fact reproduced and reinforced hierarchies of race and class. These divisions between women, while not new, have only deepened during the last 40 years of neoliberal governance. Furthermore, they present a real problem for contemporary feminist politics, which, on the one hand, seek to continue and extend the gains that have been made in the terrain of work while, at the same time, be attentive to the terrain of care, the family and the politics of reproduction. While some women may indeed be able to 'have it

all', it is clear that this option is not currently available to the majority of women.

The chapter brings multiple sites of data into dialogue with each other - *Nursery World*, *Mumsnet* and several ethnographic encounters. These sites are analysed concurrently, woven together in such a way that reflects how they reinforce and produce each other. The purpose of bringing these multiple sites of data into dialogue, sketching some of the boundaries and connections between the spaces of work and care and the constructions of the childcare sector and motherhood, is to produce a scale of analysis that resists exclusively understanding reproduction at the level of abstraction and, at the same time, is structured by, but not solely orientated towards, the knowledge and experiences of the "fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" (Katz, 2001).

This chapter captures some of the present of work and care in neoliberal Britain. The chapter begins by noting the transformations that have occurred to the conditions of waged work in Britain. The picture that emerges of motherhood and the political economy of reproduction is one that is profoundly polarised with regard to income and working conditions, particularly at the intersection of class and race relations. However, some commonalities also emerge, such as a generalised extension and intensification of work, the normalisation of atypical working hours and the prevalence of dual income households.

The chapter then moves on to trace some of the technologies, policies and infrastructures that produce the gendered sites of work and care. I argue that it is the discourse of *choice* that organises neoliberal reproduction, understood in this instance to capture the relations of motherhood, work/life balance and the processes and practices of the ever-expanding childcare market. However, the discourse of choice is also deployed in feminist, as well as neoliberal, discourses of reproduction. This entanglement between feminist and neoliberal discourses is interrogated within the concept of a "postfeminist sensibility" (Gill and Scharff 2011). The chapter maps the connections between the discursive formation of choice and changes in government policy, specifically the implementation in 1998 of New Labour's *National Childcare Strategy*.

### 4.3 The production of atypical work

In media reports at the time of the opening of Russell Hill Road Day Nursery, the owner, Natalie Salawa, explains that her motivation for opening a 24-hour childcare service came about after parents in the area who work shifts and weekends expressed the need for extended hours (Morton 2012). In another media article parents' need for flexibility was again stressed "it is not just single parents and shift-workers who need the £53.52-a-night service in today's 24-hour work culture, [w]e also have couples who are perhaps bankers and lawyers and one is working away and the other is on a case — it gives them that flexibility" (Croydon Advertiser 2012).

Leaving aside for a moment the question of how many middle-class professional couples, such as bankers and lawyers, would use a 24-hour nursery as opposed to employ the services of a nanny or *au pair*, one commonality that emerges is the question of extended and atypical working hours. While Britain has one of the highest rates of part-time work among developed countries (22 percent of employees work less than 30 hours a week), nearly half of all workers (46 percent) work more than 40 hours per week, with 11 percent working more than 48 hours per week (WERS 2011). With regard to maternal employment, Britain has one of the highest employment rates in Europe for mothers of pre-school aged children (under fives) but one of the lowest rates of maternal full-time employment — just one in four couples both work full-time (Nursery World 2014c).

The Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2011) not only charts the intensification of work but also the changing nature of the conditions of employment in Britain. The number of workplaces where at least some employees work in shifts has increased to 31 percent in 2011, an increase from 24 percent in 2004. This increase is perhaps indicative of the increasing presence and reality of Britain's 24-hour economy, with over half a million more people regularly working nights in 2012 than in 2002 (HM Treasury 2013). According to HM Treasury the sectors with the highest number of night shift-workers are public services —particularly health and social work— distribution, hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, and manufacturing.

The expansion of zero hour<sup>12</sup> contracts has also increased over the same period, with 7 percent of workplaces employing workers on such contracts, up from 4 percent in 2004. Some of the sectors with the highest concentration of workers employed on zero hour contracts are accommodation and food services; health and social work; and the education sector (ONS 2016). Recent data concerning the expansion of zero hour contracts shows that 2.3 percent of all workers in Britain are now working on such contracts, the result being that 697,000 workers have no guarantee or security in the numbers of hours and hence wages they receive (ONS 2015a). On average, workers on zero hour contracts are working 26 hours per week, however one third of workers want more hours (ONS 2016). A study in the United States of work-hour problems faced by low-wage women in precarious jobs identified similar problems, including unpredictable schedules and inadequate hours (Jacobs and Padavic 2014).

The dedicated human resources section of *Nursery World* featured a “HR Update: Zero hour contracts” in the February 2014 edition of the magazine (Nursery World 2014b). The advantages for nurseries of using zero hour contracts are listed as: being able to cover temporary staff shortages; that bank or agency staff can be more expensive; and that, with zero hour contracts there is no ongoing requirement to provide guaranteed levels of work for staff. The only downside discussed is that the worker has no ongoing requirement to accept offers of work. In this discussion the calculus of the benefits and risks of the discourse of zero hour contracts exposes the working conditions of childcare workers to the logic of the market, with employers and employee both set free from previously existing rights and entitlements afforded to them under employment contracts that guaranteed levels of work and hence security of income. It is also necessary to note that what is not present in this discussion of childcare workers employed on zero hour contracts are the social costs of precarious employment, the inability of

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<sup>12</sup> According to ACAS, a zero hours contract is generally understood to be a contract between an employer and a worker where, [1] the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum working hours, and [2] the worker is not obliged to accept any work offered. On 26 May 2015, new regulations about zero hour contracts were brought in. The law prevents employers from enforcing 'exclusivity clauses' in a zero hours contract. An exclusivity clause would be where an employer restricts workers from working for other employers (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4468> - last accessed 1 Feb, 2016).

nurseries to retain quality staff, the negative effects of high staff turnover and the lack of continuity in care for young children.

One long-term trend that has been identified both in the US (Kalleberg 2011) and in Britain (Goos and Manning 2003) is that, alongside new job creation in high-skill, high-wage professional and managerial occupations, in the last two decades there has also been a sharp reduction in middle-wage occupations and significant growth of lower wage service occupations — a trend that scholars have identified as leading to the polarisation of the economy into high quality and low quality jobs. In Britain, Sissons characterises the trend as “a gradual hollowing-out of the labour market” (2011:4). In this new ‘hourglass economy’, polarised into ‘good jobs’ and ‘bad jobs; good jobs pay relatively well, provide additional benefits, offer autonomy, and offer some flexibility and control over scheduling, whereas bad jobs lack these features (Kalleberg 2011). In fact, as Jacob and Padavic (2014) argue, it is the lowest paying jobs that offer the least flexibility yet demand the most flexibility from workers.

The process of labour market deregulation and the shift from a manufacturing base to an economy dominated by knowledge and service industry jobs has not been gender neutral. While there has been growth in female employment in professional occupations, there has been stronger growth in personal service occupations (Sissons 2011). The trend of the polarisation towards “lousy and lovely jobs” (Goos and Manning 2003a) has developed alongside the gendered reorganisation of household earnings, with families increasingly dependent on two earners, in many cases a ‘one-and-half earner’ model for families with younger children. In this sense, women’s waged work has been the mechanism by which families have absorbed the deindustrialisation and decline in male wages (Hochschild and Machung 2003). However, existing research in both the USA and Britain shows that the new ‘flexible’ economy has offered women from different social classes dramatically different experiences and opportunities (Jacobs and Padavic 2014).

With atypical working hours fast becoming the norm for many parents, it is unsurprising that Russell Hill is not alone in providing 24-hour childcare. Another private childcare setting in Manchester, Kids Around of the Clock

opened in 2000 and also provides childcare from 7am–7pm. They also offer parents a range of services; pick ups from home, drop offs, before school, after school, school holiday day-care and overnight stays. Their website states “we understand that your lives don’t fit into a 9am – 5pm day or even 8am – 6pm. What we offer is complete wrap around care from 7am – 7pm.”<sup>13</sup> Reporting on the new flexible and extended-hours childminding service established by Brent Council in 2014, Zoe Williams highlights the changes in the nature of employment, in that work is:

less secure, contracts are zero hours, people are taking part-time jobs not because they're more convenient but because they can't get full-time work. This is what's driving unusual hours, the sheer precariousness that leaves parents unable to set terms (Williams 2014).

In responding to parents’ need for extended childcare, the provision of flexible, extended and overnight care in places like Purely, Brent and Manchester confirms the statistics: the UK has the highest rates of atypical working in Europe and UK-specific research demonstrates that there are very high levels of atypical working conditions among parents (Lyonette 2011). Put simply, working atypical hours is now more common in the general working population than only working a ‘standard’ 9 to 5, Monday to Friday week. Furthermore, atypical working hours have been structuring working life for over ten years in Britain (Statham and Mooney 2003). The 2002 study by La Valle *et al.* using information from over 5,000 randomly selected households with children, found that 53 percent of employed mothers frequently work atypical hours, compared to 20 percent who do occasional atypical work and only 27 percent who don't work atypical hours. For employed fathers, 79 percent frequently work atypical hours, 14 do occasionally and 7 percent never do so. The combined working patterns of couples showed that in 43 percent of dual-earner households both parents frequently work atypical hours. In just 12 percent of dual-earner households neither parent works atypical hours.

The difficulties that dual earning and single parent households are currently facing in the new ‘flexible’ and ‘atypical’ labour market have been highlighted in research, especially in relation to the implications for the care of children

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<sup>13</sup> <http://kidsaroundtheclock.co.uk> (last accessed 1 Feb, 2016)

and effects on family life (Rutter and Evans 2012, La Valle et al. 2002, Barnes, Bryson, and Smith 2006). In the La Valle *et al.* (2002) study some of the common issues faced by parents working atypical hours include: not being available to eat evening meals together (59 percent of mothers who frequently worked at atypical times said that their job prevented them from sharing an evening meal with the rest of the family), not being available to go on family holidays and other activities such as reading and playing with children and helping with homework, nor being able to take children to after-school sport activities or visiting family and friends.

In addition, the research by La Valle *et al.* shows that a large majority of mothers (75 percent) said that atypical hours were a requirement of their job rather than a choice and a majority of mothers working atypical hours said they would prefer to work different hours (2002:15). Single mothers were more likely than mothers in a partnership to say that their working hours were a requirement of their job (83 percent and 73 percent respectively). In this instance, the notion of a flexible labour market creating more choices for working mothers operates to obscure the non-choices that many working mothers are currently facing. It is clear that there is a considerable distance between the lived experiences of parents, mostly mothers, who are unable to set the terms of their work and the discourse that flexible and extended childcare provides parents, again, mostly mothers, with more choice.

In mapping the discursive elements that organise and render work and care in the ways that we know them today, it is useful to note the multiple constructions of motherhood and the sometimes contradictory discourses that structure female subjectivity. It is possible to argue that there have been significant economic and social benefits achieved by some women via their participation in the waged labour market and that childcare provision has enabled many women with children to participate in the waged labour market. However, at the same time, it is necessary to interrogate how childcare — with 24-hour care being the most recent development of formalised provision — operates as a mechanism that structures the wage relation in increasingly more precarious, demanding and exploitative ways. These tensions — of benefits for some and increased exploitation for others — can be usefully put into dialogue with the ways that reproduction and wage



relations have been reorganised under neoliberalism. Considering that the expansion of maternal employment has offered women from different social classes dramatically different experiences and opportunities, the following section investigates in more detail the feminist and neoliberal discourses of choice.

#### **4.4 The Organisation of Choice**

In January 2015, the Labour Force Survey reported that 73.3 percent of people in Britain aged between 16-65 were in work; the highest rate of employment since comparable records began in 1971 (ONS 2015b). Of the nearly three-quarters of the adult population who are in work, 78.1 percent were men, and 68.5 percent women. The statistics of female rates of employment, like those of overall employment rates, were also the highest rates since comparable records began. The dramatic increases in female employment have largely been driven by increases in women with dependent children entering the workforce (ONS 2013b). The scale of the transformation can be grasped by comparing historical maternal employment rates. The 1961 Census shows that only 12 percent of mothers with preschool aged children were working. Five decades later in 2011, the number of mothers with preschool aged children in work is nearly 70 percent. It is clear that such an increase constitutes considerable social change and also that such change has brought to the fore a set of complex issues and problems, especially for working mothers.

In focusing on the increases to maternal employment it is useful to consider the ways that childcare has emerged in different locations and how care produces and is produced by racialised and gendered class subjects. Among parents, it is overwhelmingly mothers who need 24-hour childcare. In addition, we find that work, both high-paid professional work as well as low-paid service work, has saturated evermore aspects of life, seeping into all hours of the day and night. The twenty-first century landscape of Britain, after nearly 40 years of neoliberalism, is one dominated by work. Not only are more people working, particularly more women, but working conditions, union membership, hours of work, and the types of occupations and contracts that people are employed on have also dramatically changed (Dex 2003).

Across the terrains of both work and care the language of choice is common, it occurs as an everyday common sense that organises female subjectivity and reproduction. When one dwells in the terrain of reproduction, from the kitchen and the playground to the school gates and antenatal clinics or supermarket aisles, one hears the constant refrain and evocation of choice. The most cursory of observations produces a repetition of choice: from mothers discussing their choice of which buggy to buy; or choosing between childcare options; to IVF treatments providing a previously unavailable choice; or mothers choosing to end maternity leave early; parents eager to choose a house in a 'good' school catchment area; or the ever expanding choice of parenting styles — choice pops up routinely and regularly.

Disposable nappy brands are called "Parents Choice", snack food aimed at young children carries a gold star that has been voted "Mum's Choice" and "Mothers Choice" is a 30 year-old nursery product brand. In their multigenerational empirical study, Thomson *et al.* (2011) posit that the common cultures of contemporary motherhood are organised through the rhetoric of choice, a device that renders parenting practices, experiences and identities intelligible. Tracey Jensen makes a similar point, arguing that "contemporary mothers are constantly compelled to evaluate their maternal experiences in relation to the 'choices' they are making and, as such, to monitor how and where they are 'getting motherhood right' (or wrong) and whether they are making the 'right' choices" (2013:137).

The language of choice extends beyond parenting styles, childcare options and advertising for commodities into feminist slogans and the politics of biological reproduction. Some of the most well-known feminist slogans are that of being 'pro-choice' and 'my body, my choice'. Extending the language of choice beyond biological reproduction to the now-mainstreamed feminist principles of equality and empowerment, these discourses are advanced to give women more options; specifically, more choices in education, employment and more choice in the contribution they make to their families and households. Much of what has now consolidated as a mainstream feminist politics centres on creating the space for (some) women to conceive of themselves as making choices, with one of key choices being if and when to have children. Present in this discourse is the desire of women to not be

defined by a destiny that is always-already motherhood. In this instance, choice as a language of feminism disrupts previous naturalised ideas of female destiny and capabilities and, in doing so, the ideas of (some) women's agency, equality, achievement and self-determination are rendered intelligible.

However, at the same time that feminism has utilised the language of choice, neoliberalism has also mobilised and reorganised choice. In many ways, one could argue that neoliberalism has destabilised feminist choice. Where once choice was contextualised within a social democratic framework of social entitlements, rights and the promotion of good citizenship, the operation of choice within neoliberalism is such that it operates to reaffirm the individual and, furthermore, to produce an individualisation of social problems. In doing so, the reorganisation of choice by neoliberalism has produced a renaturalisation of risk, decision-making and behaviour and recoded them as a matter of an individual's social character.

A tension develops where choice is both central to mainstream feminist politics and, at the same time, the discourse of choice is how neoliberalism enters the home and reorganises reproduction. It is this moment of a "double entanglement" (McRobbie 2004:255) of feminism and neoliberalism, that Gill and Scharff argue is captured within the articulation of "postfeminism as a sensibility" (2011:4). Their articulation of postfeminism seeks to expose what is new about the contemporary organisation of gender as well as acknowledge that the entire history of feminist struggle has been characterised by strategies of resistance, negotiation and containment. In developing McRobbie's argument, Gill and Scharff position postfeminism as an "object of critical analysis" (2011:4), contra to alternative readings that articulate postfeminism as a theoretical orientation, a new moment of feminism, or as a form of straightforward anti-feminist backlash. Of relevance to the argument in this chapter concerning the destabilisation of feminist choice by neoliberalism, Gill and Scharff suggest that a postfeminist sensibility includes the notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; one that involves an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; and an

emphasis upon consumerism and the communication of difference. They note that “these themes coexist with, and are structured by stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to race and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender” (2011:4).

In tracing the specific elements of choice that organises the terrains of work and care, many aspects of a postfeminist sensibility emerge. It is possible to see how postfeminism as a ‘technology of neoliberalism’ (Foucault 2008) is able to simultaneously take feminism into account and repudiate it. For instance, the neoliberal reorganisation of choice connects to issues of reproduction through the mobilisation of rational choice and the assumption of the adult worker model, “where both fathers and mothers are seen as primarily workers in the labour market, who pool their earned income in supporting themselves and their children” (Duncan et al. 2004:255). In this articulation, the neoliberal emphasis on the individualisation of responsibility, produces the “notion of individual families sifting through possible childcare options (unhindered by concerns with affordability, availability or quality) in order to make an appropriate choice” (Vincent and Ball 2006:36).

In this context, childcare services and care provision are overwhelmingly constructed in economic terms and as Duncan *et al.*, (2004) argue, government policy assumes that parents share this predominately economic perspective with regard to care. The neoliberal logic that positions childcare primarily within economic terms relies on a discourse that emphasises the benefits of increasing the numbers of mothers in the labour market, as well as mobilising a language of gender equality. Moreover, increased female labour market participation is assumed to be central to achieving gender equality. Situated within more generalised tendencies of individualisation “women are seen [as] taking up the identity of ‘independent’ paid workers rather than ‘dependent’ carers” (Duncan et al. 2004:2). This shift from dependence to independence is a process in which the entanglements of neoliberalism and gender facilitate both a doing and an undoing of feminist desire for women’s economic, legal and political autonomy.

The inference of choice is that in making a decision, one is also in possession of two or more possibilities; for someone to be exercising a choice they need

to be choosing between different options. The centrality of the discourse of choice to neoliberalism can be located within the specific deployment of rational choice theory, in which economics becomes the science of choice. Rational choice theory, popularised by Gary Becker (1976) brings the individual to the centre of governance and renders the individual (as opposed to the state) responsible for the choices they make. However, the meaning of rationality is both specific and narrow in that “an individual acts as if balancing costs against benefits to arrive at action that maximises personal advantage (Friedman 1953:15). Ogu (2013) posits rational choice theory as sociologically minimalist, in that it begins with a few simplified assumptions about the individual and about relations between individuals (such as individualism; optimality; structures; self-regulating interest; and rationality) that run counter to symbolic interaction, interpretive and feminist approaches that adopt a more dense and complex view of social actors and social interaction.

McRobbie (2004, 2009) argues that the neoliberal adult worker model is organised around the figure of a de-gendered worker who has been stripped of the right to claim sexual difference in exchange for a specific kind of freedom, empowerment and choice. It is this de-gendered adult worker who sits at the centre of government childcare policy — policy that constructs the choosing of childcare as just one component of parents’ cost-benefit calculations in taking up employment. Government policy expects that parents “will exercise ‘rational choice’ in making individualistic decisions about how to maximise their personal gain” (Duncan et al. 2004:2).

The process of mapping the various elements through which postfeminism operates assists in making visible the entanglements of feminism and neoliberalism in such a way that does not render second-wave feminism the “handmaiden for capitalism” (Fraser 2013, 2009). Nancy Fraser’s argument about the complicity of feminism in the emergence of neoliberalism is not targeted at expressions of politics that claim a feminist perspective yet promote conservative, reactionary or indeed anti-feminist positions,<sup>14</sup> nor is

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<sup>14</sup> An extreme example of which would be the 2008 US Republican candidate for Vice President Sarah Palin’s simultaneous claim to be a feminist and against all forms of abortion.

Fraser's critique directed at the mode of neoliberal governmentality, that Judith Butler (2004) and Joan W. Scott (2007) refer to as a process of instrumentality, where certain feminist discourses are co-opted by governments in order to "pursue a completely different agenda which often entails the denigration of other cultures where it is argued that women are degraded or their human rights are violated" (McRobbie 2011:xii). It is worth noting that processes of instrumentality are not unique to second-wave feminist politics, with similar processes identified within the reconfigurations of sexuality, race, gender and nation that Jasbir Puar (2007) refers to as "homonationalisms".

On the contrary, Fraser's argument seeks to analyse "second-wave feminism whole, as an epochal social phenomenon" (Fraser 2009:97). According to Fraser, the radical potential of second-wave feminism was its historical ability to critique androcentric<sup>15</sup>, state-organised capitalism through a concept of gender inequality that contained three analytically distinct yet fused dimensions of economic, cultural and political critique. Fraser's diagnosis is that there has been a fragmentation of feminist critique, through which the "three dimensions of gender injustice have become separated, both from one another and from the critique of capitalism" (2009:99).

Aslan and Gambetti's (2011) nuanced rebuttal of Fraser's argument rejects Fraser's attempts to disregard the differences between feminist movements in their cultural, political and geographical contexts and highlight how she "defines demands formulated by the second-wave feminism of a particular class in the North as being those of the entire feminist movement" (2011:137). A political and analytical move that they point out "actually reads like a repetition of the history of second-wave feminism itself" (2011:137). One that invalidates and obscures the critiques and criticisms advanced by black and post-colonial feminist theory (Mohanty 1988, Collins 2000, Carby 1982, Davis 1983), as well as ignoring the campaigns and politics of feminist movements in the global South. Also responding to Fraser's argument, Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2013) note that, from the 1970s onwards, Black

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<sup>15</sup> Androcentrism refers to the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing male human beings or a masculine point of view at the centre of one's worldview and its culture and history.

and Third World feminist scholars and activists have engaged in feminist critique that has not only directed its attention towards the state and capitalism, but that of a globalised capitalism rooted in the legacies of colonialism and slavery. They write “the literature is vast, the examples myriad, and thus, it’s all the more tiring when White feminists speak of second-wave feminism as if it were the only ‘feminism’ and use the pronoun ‘we’ when lamenting the failures of their struggles” (Bhandar and Ferreira da Silva 2013).

In contrast to Fraser’s argument of complicity and co-optation, the perspective of postfeminism as a technology of power within neoliberalism makes it possible to identify the tendencies and points of conflict within feminist movements and feminist theory, as well as identify the moments at which certain feminisms are able to produce productive spaces of resistance, without recourse to a universalised gender politics. At the same time, it is clear that there is a feminist-subject position that “has sat very comfortably in the seat of the self-determined, emancipated subject. That position, of course, is that which [Fraser] identifies as a contributor to neoliberalism” (Bhandar and Ferreira da Silva 2013). The point being that the feminism Fraser is describing shares with neoliberalism the same liberal core, one that “Black and Third World feminists have identified and exposed since very early in the trajectory of feminisms” (Bhandar and Ferreira da Silva 2013).

In addition, Aslan and Gambetti (2011) question whether it is possible to assess second-wave feminism independently of the organisational crises that opposition movements in countries of the global North were plunged into in the late 1970s. They argue that it is a mistake “to construe capitalism as a system that is coherent and devoid of contradictions such that certain demands may unambiguously stand against it, while others cannot” (2011:145). They also argue that “neoliberalism does not breed from the ashes of collapsed traditions” (Aslan and Gambetti 2011:144). Developing the work of Wendy Brown (2003), they argue that neoliberalism builds upon the institutions of tradition and they gesture towards some of the contradictory alliances that exist when “neoconservatism calls women back into the home to become mothers of their children and the aid and support of their

husbands, while neoliberalism exhorts them to become cheap sources of labour” (Aslan and Gambetti 2011:144).

To make sense of these seemingly paradoxical alliances — contradictions that often play out on the bodies of women — it is useful to characterise actually existing neoliberalism, as Brown (2003) does, as a far cry from the infamous *laissez faire* ideas that animated classical liberal theory. Within neoliberalism the market exceeds the economy, in that “the role of political and economic action is to extend and disseminate market values to all institutions and social action” (Brown 2003:7). The belief in the market and, furthermore, the belief in the market as an ethic in itself— one that is capable of organising behaviour far beyond the scope of the market— is clear, violently so, in the words of Margaret Thatcher when she says: “Economics are the method: the object is to change the soul”.

At the same time as operating as a constructivist project, one of the defining characteristics of neoliberalism is the recasting of governing as a technical rather than a political activity (Brown 2003, Duggan 2003). Lisa Duggan argues that the rhetorical separation of the economic from the political and cultural arenas effectively obscures the upwardly redistributing goals of neoliberalism and “its concerted effort to concentrate power and resources in the hands of tiny elites” (Duggan 2003:xvi). Taking the two aspects together of — deliberate intervention and depoliticisation — neoliberalism can usefully be articulated as “a mobile, calculated technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising” (Gill and Scharff 2011:5).

Circling back to the question of the connections between childcare and neoliberal governance, it becomes clear that, in privatising childcare services, the aim is not simply to “wring profit from what were once public services, but to change the way people interact with each other and change their expectations of the state” (Barbagallo and Beuret 2012). It is through the discourse of choice that neoliberalism enters the home and brings the ethic of the market to bear on a sphere of activity and labour that has traditionally been excluded from market relations — that of unwaged reproduction. At the same time neoliberalism is able to reorganise liberal feminist desires for gender equality in the workplace through the promotion of the de-gendered



adult worker model. By compelling parents to perform as good neoliberal subjects (rational, enterprising, risk-calculating individuals) which includes choosing the childcare option 'that is right for them', the specific and collective needs of people with children — particularly women with dependent children — are effectively managed and, importantly, contained within the individualised logic of the market.

#### **4.5 Never-ending Markets**

I never wanted to be equal to a wage slave - Silvia Federici, Goldsmiths College, Public Lecture (2012)

Jane Lewis (2008) argues that government intervention into the issue of how and by whom young children should be cared for is reflected through two different sets of policies: time to care and time to work. She argues that maternity and paternity leave and the right to request flexible working hours allow parents (for the most part mothers) time to care. The other main set of government policies regarding the care of children is the provision of childcare services, which allow parents time to work and, again, these policies are directed particularly at mothers who have historically had the main responsibility for care. The two sets of government policies are discursively separated to facilitate time to care and, conversely, time to work. As such they aim to address the distinctive issues and needs of the child and mother as well as more broadly tapping into the 'potential' of female labour-power. However in many ways, time to care policies are, from the outset, limited time. Time that is measured and valued as time away from work. In Britain, time to care policies provide basic maternity employment rights for women to return to their previous employment and statutory maternity pay, at a level well-below minimum wage income for up to the first nine months of leave. Shared paternal leave has also been introduced and fathers are entitled to two weeks of paid paternity leave. The implicit understanding is that, unless one's financial situation affords otherwise, child bearing and those initial few months of childrearing while on 'leave' are but a momentary break from earning a wage.

It is within the matrix of the policies, discourses and childcare provision that provide parents, particularly mothers time to work that this chapter interrogates the emergence of 24-hour childcare in Britain, as well as the transformations and changes that have occurred in the last 40 years to both work and home. In the following three sections the transformations to work and care are interrogated alongside a gendered analysis of waged employment and the 'new' conditions of contemporary work as atypical and flexible. The analysis also considers how waged work for some workers has been made ever more precarious and explores various government policies concerning maternal employment, and policies directed at single mothers in particular.

One of the tensions that animates contemporary questions of family life and that of work is that, while maternal employment (either part-time or full-time) is now overwhelmingly the norm, traditional attitudes and discourses concerning children and mothering, in which mothers have the primary responsibility for the care and development of their children, remain powerful and widespread (Bradley, Fenton, and West 2003, Vincent and Ball 2006, Duncan et al. 2004). Vincent and Ball discuss what they term a "confusion over the status of motherhood" (2006:84) due to women with children being located at the nexus of two competing discourses. One discourse celebrates and promotes the de-gendered adult worker, in which women workers are contributing their skills to the economy and achieving professional fulfilment and satisfaction. The other discourse constructs women with children and "almost excessively genders her, and celebrates her 'natural' abilities. It understands 'good' mothering as the key to a child's successful development, placing the responsibility and onus on the mother" (Vincent and Ball 2006:84).

It is also useful to complicate the organisation of childcare a little, in that the options available with respect to care are not simply a binary between parents, mostly mothers, undertaking care or that of institutional care in nurseries or preschools. Another choice that many families make, or would prefer to make if they could, is informal family care; care that is overwhelming provided by grandparents or other relatives and friends (Wheelock and Jones 2002, Duncan et al. 2004). Grandparents, again mostly

grandmothers in Britain perform the greatest amount of childcare after parents themselves (Grandparents Plus Report 2009). For many families, maternal employment can only be understood as a choice because childcare is provided at very little financial cost on an informal basis. However, cost is not the only factor, or even the most important factor, in parents' decisions to choose informal care. The choice of informal care, often expressed as 'the next best thing' after parental care, reflects the belief and desire that children should be cared for in the home. Here the confusion over the status of motherhood is able to be resolved without challenging any of the assumptions that privilege maternal care over other forms of care. Informal care allows for the parent, usually the mother, to be set free (of her caring responsibilities) so as to be able to do 'real work', replaced with a substitute, again usually a mother who is valued for performing care in the home.

In addition, it is interesting to consider how the discourse of choice seeks to resolve the confusion of motherhood by focusing on the individualised nature of reproductive choices that are expressed as 'right for you and your family'. Of note is also the feminist assertion that it is a woman's right to choose and that women should not be judged for their choices. Both the individual claim that 'it was/is my choice' and also the feminist assertion that 'women have the right to choose' reassign women's actions and decisions back into a privatised and individual realm, beyond the reach of politics but not that of policy.

The connections between the discourse that situates childcare as providing choice and the discourse that promotes increasing women's participation in the workforce have become increasingly explicit. The connection appears regularly in *Nursery World*, often expressed in unambiguous language: "Universal flexible and affordable childcare would enable more mothers of pre-school children to work" (Nursery World 2014e:12). Within dominant discourses of gender equality female employment has been elevated to the status of an unquestionable good and policies aimed at increasing maternal employment follow the same logic. The benefits are spelt out in overtly economic terms. A report by the Institute of Public Policy Research argues that if maternal employment was to rise by 5 percent, the estimated 150,000

more mothers in work would generate £750 million (Nursery World 2014e:12).

Research carried out by Kellogg's claims that "more than one in four parents would be forced to quit their jobs if they were unable to send their child to school breakfast club" (Nursery World 2014e:12). As a breakfast cereal manufacturer whose products are routinely served at breakfast clubs across Britain, it is easy to understand Kellogg's support for extended out-of-school provision at breakfast time. In their research the link between care and work is clearly stated "parents who use breakfast clubs are able to work an additional 93.6 hours a year" (Nursery World 2014e:12). The message here is clear— childcare makes sense. It means more parents can work and, combined with the economic measurement of the money generated from such work, it represents a good investment that provides parents with more choice.

Another example of the prevalence of discourses of maternal employment is the decision by *Mumsnet* to launch Mumsnet Jobs<sup>16</sup> in May 2015. Mumsnet Jobs is a jobs-board that according to the website "aims to put parents in touch with employers who are actively recruiting amongst parents". Here the premier online forum "in which motherhood is displayed and consumed" (Thomson et al. 2011) smoothly blends the two identities of worker and mother. Alongside job vacancy adverts, Mumsnet Jobs offers advice on returning to work after time out with kids and childcare sits at the top the careers advice list. The website reads "getting childcare sorted is key to the rest of the returning-to-work process". In addition, the hundreds of posts on the Mumsnet Talk forum about childcare include everything from asking for recommendations on good nurseries, to what is considered a normal rate of pay for nannies, and horror stories of living with *au pairs*. These posts indicate that 'getting childcare sorted' continues to dominate much of the logistical, as well as the emotional, experiences of working mothers in Britain.

The difficulties of trying to combine waged work and care can be thought of as being produced by emotional and affective considerations, as well as

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<sup>16</sup> See [www.jobs.mumsnet.com](http://www.jobs.mumsnet.com) (last accessed 1 Feb, 2016)

‘external’ factors such as the age of dependent children and the cost of childcare. These external factors become more visible when one considers the difference that cohabitation with a partner makes to who is able to work outside the home. Parents of young children (aged under five) were almost twice as likely to be in employment if they are in a couple (78.6 percent) than if they were single parents (40.9 percent) (ONS 2014b). Despite their specific difficulties in combining work and care, the labour market participation of single parents, the overwhelming majority of which are women (96 percent), has increased significantly over the last 20 years. The percentage of single mothers in work in 2014 is the highest (62.3 percent) since comparable records began in 1996 (ONS 2014b). Single mothers have not only been the focus of dedicated national government and European policy initiatives to encourage female employment, but changes in the state welfare benefits system have also been directed at so-called ‘workless families’.

The focus on increasing employment rates among single mothers and the changes to welfare policies that have attempted to create the compulsion to work have not occurred within a vacuum, with considerable media and political discourse centred on constructing ‘single mums’ as welfare cheats who are ultimately work-shy and out to defraud the welfare system by having children. Here the language of choice, specifically the disciplining of those who are constructed as making a choice ‘not to work’ reaffirms the logics of the neoliberal adult worker model. The genderless adult worker is positioned in contrast to the ‘dependent carer’ who, in this instance, is not dependent on her partner or husband but on the welfare system. In demanding that all available adults be defined first as workers, women’s choices to have children are framed as an individualised responsibility, to which they bear the costs and associated risks. Of course, the demonization of women who have children outside traditional family structures is hardly a new phenomena (Thane and Evans 2013). However, counter to the dominant media discourse of young working-class mothers dependent on benefits, living in council-funded housing and in unstable relationships with multiple

partners, are the statistics of single parents in Britain produced by the national charity Gingerbread<sup>17</sup>.

Research by Gingerbread shows that there are two million single parents in Britain today and they make up a quarter of all families with children, a figure which has remained consistent for the past decade. Furthermore, less than 2 percent of single parents are teenagers, the median age of single parents is, in contrast, 38.1 years old and around half of single parents had their children within marriage — 49 percent are separated from marriage, divorced or widowed (Gingerbread 2015). The distance between the much rehearsed image of welfare dependent teenage single mum who has made ‘bad’ reproductive choices and the significant number of single parent households who are headed up by women (96 percent) who are in their 30s and 40s not only highlights the recent transformation of family structures but exposes how mothers who live in non-traditional families continue to be disciplined and governed through stigma and prejudice. What is also clear is that within the postfeminist and neoliberal discourse of choice that renders the social phenomenon of raising children as an individuated moment, there is scope for the normalisation of non-traditional family structures, provided that the individual families, and not the state, meet the costs of such choices.

The discourse that constructs single mothers as ‘welfare cheats’ presents an interesting tension with the neoliberal model or, rather, it illustrates a cynical pragmatism at play in the discourse of choice. In so far as Becker (1976) mobilises a language of rational economic agents (single mothers who ‘choose’ not to work for wages might simply be behaving as rational agents), there is also an intensely moral language about choices. This morality of choice is deployed in such a way as to promote and support instances of governmentality in which the neoliberal state can ‘correct’ or realign incentives, such that individuals make the ‘right choices’.

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<sup>17</sup> The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child founded in 1918 and Gingerbread founded in 1970 merged in 2007 creating an organisation with a mix of campaigning experts, highly respected support services, and extensive grassroots reach among single parents (source: Our History, Gingerbread, <http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/content/442/Our-history> - last accessed 1 Feb 2106)

Single mothers feature regularly in discussions of parents' need for extended and flexible childcare. In part this is because, in many so called 'traditional' households, the organisation of labour both outside and inside the home means that one parent, usually the mother, is available for childcare. In households that adopt the one-and-half worker model it is overwhelmingly the mother who continues to be available for significant amounts of childcare (Duncan et al. 2004). However, such adjustments are not often available for single mother households. Moreover, one could argue that single mother households have operated as discursive laboratories in which the discourse of the adult worker model has first been applied and then extended to dual parent households. This is especially true when we consider the changes to government policies over the last 15 years. The ONS (2014b:6) argues that the increase in the percentage of working single parent families can be attributed to a combination of policy initiatives, including changes in the characteristics of single parents over time and general increases in employment rates in the UK. However, the report also highlights policy initiatives, introduced over the past 15 years, that have directly aimed to increase the number of single parents in work including financial incentives to work and work promotion programmes; the New Deal for Lone Parents (1998-2011; changes to Lone Parent Obligation (2008 - 2012); and the Work Programme (2001 - to present).

The changes to Lone Parent Obligation that began in 2008 have been significant; prior to 2008, lone parents were eligible to claim Income Support provided their young child was under 16 (ONS 2014b:8). Between 2008 and 2012, the age criterion at which Income Support could be claimed was reduced incrementally down to children under the age of five<sup>18</sup>. The expectation, at least from government policy is that single parents with school-age children are expected to be in the waged labour market. Where in the past, the fact that single mothers had childcare obligations might have acted as a block to withdrawing their access to state benefits and enforcing paid work, the expansion of the childcare sector and emergence of both

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<sup>18</sup> In 2008 Income Support was restricted to lone parents with children under 12, followed by further reductions; in 2009 it was restricted to children under 10, in 2010 it was restricted to children under 7 and in 2012 it was restricted to lone parents with children under 5 (ONS, 2014 families in the labour market).

atypical and flexible work and care has reconfigured the constraints of care through a discourse of creating more choice for single mothers.

In thinking through the question of who is organised and governed by the discourse of 24-hour childcare as choice, it is primarily dual-earning and single parent households, parents who are increasingly working atypical hours. There is nothing particularly new about men working non-standard hours. As Clare Lyonette (2011) argues, atypical working hours were relatively invisible as a problem when the male breadwinner and female unwaged carer model was the dominant, though never universal, form of organisation of gender and labour in post-war Britain. Not only is non-standard or atypical working hours not a new phenomenon for men, some occupations like nursing, policing and work in some manufacturing industries have always required shift-work and operated on a 24-hour basis. The general point is that it is atypical working hours and a deepening of the conditions of labour precarity that have been generalised throughout occupational roles and across both genders roles. With more of life and work now operating on a 24-hour basis the difficulties of combining waged work and care have only increased. In the following section I consider the specific changes to the childcare sector that followed the election of New Labour in 1997.

#### **4.6 Childcare: no longer a subject of indifference**

Consider the fact that before late 1990s, the British state played little role in the delivery, funding or policies of early childhood provision. Childcare and early education for 'under fives' was dominated by the widespread belief that care was a private matter, one that was the responsibility of the family to provide or pay for (Lewis 2013, Riley 1983b, Moss 2012, Vincent and Ball 2006). Peter Moss suggests that in the decades before 1997, childcare was "a subject of indifference to successive post-war governments" (2012:68). He outlines the provision of childcare in Britain from the 1970s until the late 1990s:

Such provision as existed was mostly in part-time nursery classes for 3 and 4 year olds located in primary schools and in 'playgroups', private non-profit services often organised by parents and offering usually only 2 or 3 mornings



of attendance per week. In addition, many 4 year olds were admitted into the first grade of primary school before compulsory school age of 5 years. Working parents needing 'child care' relied mainly on family (combined with high levels of part-time employment among mothers), or else individuals offering care in their own homes (so-called childminders) (Moss 2012:68).

Within the context of childcare being conceived of as a privatised family matter, it is useful to note that many, though certainly not all of the struggles in the 1970s and 1980s around issues of childcare consisted of feminist campaigners' attempts to get the state to take responsibility for and fund childcare provision. Lewis makes the striking point that New Labour's *National Childcare Strategy* (NCS) introduced in 1998 represented "the first time that a British government had accepted responsibility for developing childcare policy since World War II" (2013:358). Prior to the implementation of the NCS the state provision of childcare was geographically uneven and the state mostly intervened and provided care in instances when children were deemed to be 'at risk' or 'in need'. The NCS marked a significant shift in government policy, moving away from the perception of family care of children as a private matter and towards one that envisioned the issue to be under joint management of the family and the state. The discourse of intervention for children 'in need' and 'at risk' remained, though it was updated through Sure Start programmes that initially targeting low socioeconomic disadvantaged areas (Moss 2012).

Moss argues that the shift in government childcare policy followed a rapid increase in the number of women resuming employment after maternity leave and that maternal employment was a "major driver of change" (2012:68). Moss, like many other scholars, highlights the complex and intersecting reasons for increases in women's employment, these include women's desire for financial independence; economic necessity; the destruction of the well-paid manufacturing employment; and as a result of focused governmental policies. The policy emphasis on getting more women into the labour market was not restricted to Britain, it was also central to European Union (EU) policy from the 1990s onwards (Lewis, Campbell, and Huerta 2008). For example, in 2000 the Lisbon Council set a target of 60 percent female employment by 2010 and EU policy shifted towards encouraging childcare services rather than care leaves (Lewis, Campbell, and Huerta 2008). In

Britain, the New Labour government introduced a set of work/family policies that included the NCS in 1998 and included the government-funded entitlement to part-time (15-hours) childcare for the early education of 3 and 4 year olds.

Moss (2012) notes one of the changes brought about by New Labour policy was to move 'childcare' from the welfare to the education ministry and brought all early childhood education and care (ECEC) into an integrated system of regulation. However, New Labour's reforms still maintained childcare and education as two separate sectors, with the childcare sector consigned to the private sector and the other being early education sector which expanded with the new government funded 15-hour entitlement (Moss 2012:64). One of the innovations of the New Labour policy was that government funding for early education was not just available to schools providing nursery classes but to any providers and, as Moss notes, "particularly private providers" (2012:64) who could show they met certain regulations and conditions. Moss draws attention to an important dynamic that emerged, where 'childcare' remained a private responsibility with some public support for those least able to pay and 'early education' was treated as a public good with public funding. However, what both childcare and early education shared was "a market approach, with competition between a variety of providers - yet all regulated by a prescriptive government" (Moss 2012:65).

Duncan *et al.*, (2004:3) argue that government childcare policy since the implementation of the NCS has operated within the framework of an adult worker model, one that sees childcare overwhelmingly within 'rational' economic terms, which they argue has been dominated by an overemphasis on a labour-market driven strategy as the basis for childcare policy. Government policies have not only positively valued the delivery and uptake of childcare services; they have also facilitated the expansion and use of the market in the childcare sector. Moss argues that the effect of which has been to produce parents as active consumers of care and that by

[e]ntering this market, the parent-consumer should select, by the exercise of informed choice, their preferred ECEC provider, the service that, as informed consumers, they decide will best meet their needs (Moss 2012:69).

This process of producing the parent-consumer has not been gender neutral, in so far as one of the ways that the discourse of choice currently organises both work and care is via the repetition and insistence on the value, necessity and benefits of maternal employment. In this articulation of choice the meaning of childcare is such that its function — the reason it is funded by the state and valued; is because it facilitates parents being able to work. A slippage occurs quickly in that fathers, at least good fathers, are understood to already be at work, so the function of childcare is to allow and increase maternal employment, specifically it allows mothers to work. Childcare provides choice, specifically more choices for mothers and mother's choice is to work.

However, as Duncan *et al.* (2004) argue such assumptions fail to take into consideration the wider social, moral and emotional components of parenting and childcare. They argue that one of the problems of the adult worker model is that it “usually collapses into a ‘one-and-a-half worker’ model for couples with children, where the half is normally a mother working part-time, whose paid work is temporally and emotionally organised around caring for children” (Duncan et al. 2004:3). This conflict between policy and the lived experiences of care highlights that, while mobilising a language of gender equality and promoting the benefits of increasing maternal employment, one of the outcomes of the framing of childcare as choice has been to reaffirm traditional ideas that it is women who have the primary responsibility for children and their care. Furthermore, not only do women still overwhelmingly have primary responsibility for reproducing the next generation, but also they are now compelled to work. This entanglement of desire, necessity and governance illustrates Aslan and Gambetti's (2011) argument that neoliberalism builds and develops in the institutions of tradition. In this instance, the language of choice obscures the continuing gendered relations, of not only of work, but also reproductive work and, at the same time, provides the rationale for state subsidies to be paid directly to the private care providers.

There is also considerable evidence that suggests that how people make family decisions, including how families combine parenting with paid work and parent's ideas about how and who should care for children don't

necessarily conform to an individualistic, economically rational model. “Rather, they take such decisions with reference to moral and socially negotiated views about what behaviour is right and proper, and this varies between particular social groups, neighbourhood and welfare states” (Duncan et al. 2004:3).

The disparity and considerable distance that exists between the discourse of the adult worker model and the multiple points of reference that people with children incorporate into their decisions of how best to care and work is a necessary corrective. It is also a reminder that the language of choice is not new, particularly as a discourse that attempts to organise motherhood and questions of work and care. Women and their children have a long and contested history of being organised, valued and either rewarded or punished as a result of women’s waged employment, marital status or living arrangements (Thane 2011a, Thane and Evans 2013). In both the past as well as the present, the structure and organisation of choice rewards and validates parents, again mostly mothers, for making the right choices. Conversely, the discourse of choice also controls, punishes and, in some instances, criminalises mothers for their bad or wrong choices. What constitutes the right, wrong or best choice is, of course, a flexible and porous construction and one that has certainly been transformed dramatically over the last 40 years. Of interest here, is how the discourse of choice currently configures what is understood to consist of making the right choice, as well how it produces moments of resistance, counter-narratives and practices that disrupt the neoliberal organisation of reproduction and work.

The argument unfolding so far in this section has traced the shifts and changes that occurred to the organisation of childcare and women’s employment with the implementation of New Labour’s NCS from 1998 onwards. Furthermore, I have highlighted some of the connections between the Thatcher Government’s deregulation of employment and destruction of manufacturing industries with that of New Labour’s prioritisation of increasing female employment and the centrality of childcare policy to New Labour’s social and economic policies. That it is possible to trace connections and continuation between Conservative and Labour government policy suggests the hegemonic rationality of neoliberalism as a mode of governance.

As a regime of power it transcends previously existing political difference. This dynamic is evident in so far as governmental concern about increasing employment, specifically maternal employment and support for increasing the number of childcare places did not end with the election of the Conservative Government in 2010 or their re-election in 2015.

In August 2013, Chancellor George Osborne announced a new childcare voucher scheme for families where both parents work: "Tax-free childcare will help working parents by giving them more choice and better access to the quality, affordable childcare they need" (Lyons 2013). In response to criticism that the scheme would not benefit low-income families or families where one parent stays at home, Osborne told BBC Radio 4's *World at One*: "First of all I have huge respect for mothers who want to stay at home and look after their children. That's their lifestyle choice, I want to help those families too" (Lyons 2013). In this instance, choice is strategically deployed to construct one group of parents — stay at home mothers — as not working and, hence, not needing childcare due to their 'lifestyle' choices, while simultaneously mobilising the figure of the working parent as constantly in need of more choice. However, the limits of the choices available to parents are clear, in that the desire or ability to prioritise the work of reproduction over waged employment is foreclosed, unless one's 'lifestyle' affords otherwise.

What is clear is that childcare can certainly now be understood to be a politicised issue, one that is no longer a matter of indifference for any of the major political parties in Britain. However, it is also necessary to note some of the shifts in policy that have occurred since the Conservatives have been in government, specifically that the funding for early years services delivered through Children's Centres has been dramatically reduced since 2010. Children's Centres were part of New Labour's strategy of targeted early intervention services. They were services that, prior to the NCS, had been delivered in uneven ways by local councils and had been aimed primarily at children 'in need' or 'at risk'. From 2003, Children's Centres were introduced and were intended to be "multipurpose services where children under 5 and their families can receive seamless integrated services and information" (Sure Start 2005 cited in Moss 2012:68).

The move to defund Children's Centres can be traced through numerous editions of *Nursery World* in which articles and news analyses report the closure of Children Centres. Headlines such as "120 Children's Centres to close or under threat" (Nursery World 2015e:6), "A ¼ of Northumberland's Children's Centres under threat" (Nursery World 2015d:12), "More than half of Liverpool's children's centres under threat" (Nursery World 2015b:10) indicate the considerable reorganisation of children's services in Britain since the election of the Conservative government. Research conducted by the Labour Party showed that 628 children's centres had closed in the period from 2010–2014, an equivalent of three centres closing per week (Nursery World 2014d).

In contrast to the defunding of Children's Centres, after their re-election in May 2015, the Conservative Government confirmed proposals to extend the funded entitlement of childcare from 15 to 30 hours per week. However, the increased provision will, like the tax-free childcare voucher scheme, only be available to families where all parents work (Nursery World 2015e:10). These proposals work in connection with recent reforms to out-of-school provision that have encouraged more schools to offer wrap-around care from 8am to 6pm. The expansion of the funded entitlement for 3 and 4 year old needs to be contextualised and understood within a policy environment that overtly aims to dramatically reduce government spending on welfare and social services. In the current landscape of reduced government spending, the discourse of choice is able to facilitate increases to funding for childcare so long as parents have made the 'right choice' of being in work. However, for childcare to operate as a choice for working parents it needs to be affordable.

The issue of 'affordability' has in many respects overtaken previous concerns about the 'quality' of childcare, though the two terms are still often brought together in government policy, along with 'flexibility'. The prevalence of these three concepts — flexibility, quality and affordability — in relation to childcare, not only in government policy, but also by those who work in the sector and parents who access childcare services cannot be overstated. Furthermore it is useful to investigate what an emphasis on childcare being affordable and flexible produces. In March 2014, *Nursery World* reported "Childcare fees now higher than cost of mortgage" (Nursery World 2014e).

Research by the Family and Childcare Trust reports that, for a family with one child in a part-time nursery and another in an after-school club, the cost for care would be £7,549, compared with the average UK mortgage of £7,207. A similar report one year later by Family and Childcare Trust shows that the cost of part-time nursery places for under twos has risen by 33 percent in the last five years, with a place now costing £115.45 per week (Nursery World 2015d). Like experiences in other sectors that have been subjected to market expansion and privatisation, in the case of the marketisation of childcare, those who have been burdened with the increases in cost have been the consumers. It must also be noted that the relatively high cost of childcare, especially in places like London, has, in fact, worked to limit the number of employment choices that people with children (mainly mothers) have, despite considerable government action and funding that has purportedly aimed to increase parents choice and access.

The development of a mixed market of childcare provision, one dominated by the private sector but regulated by government has produced a discourse that stresses the need to provide quality childcare but places greater emphasises on affordability. Shifting the focus briefly from that of the needs of working mothers to the working conditions of the overwhelming female childcare workforce, the issue of affordability can be seen in a different light. The goal of affordability can only be achieved by either increasing ratios of children to staff or by continued downward pressure on childcare workers wages (Cowley 2015:16). A letter from a childcare worker illustrates the damaging effects of both high childcare costs and low childcare sector wages, “with a two-year-old in full-time care and me on minimum wage [in the childcare sector], I was earning £100 less per month than my childcare costs” (Nursery World 2015a:26). In this instance, the rhetoric of working mother’s choice unravels, as does the notion that stay-at-home mothers are making ‘lifestyle choices’. What is also clear is that when the reproductive labour of caring and raising children enters the market and becomes waged work it continues to be devalued as low-waged and low status work. In part this devaluation is due to the continued insistence that looking after one’s own children is ‘not-working’ and also because of the downward pressure on wages that an emphasis on affordability brings.

It is also clear that the prioritisation of 'affordability' has enabled developments in the childcare market in other directions. In 2014, the childcare nursery market, not including sessional care providers and childminders was valued at £4.9bn and private providers comprised just over £4bn of the market share (Nursery World 2014f). In addition to the dramatic growth in the size of the private market, there has also been a concentration of the private childcare market into several 'super' nursery chains, the largest in Britain being Busy Bees who operate over 237 nursery settings and provide over 21,400 nursery places (Nursery World 2014f). The next largest provider is Bright Horizons who run over 200 nursery settings, are a multinational corporation with operations in the United States. Due to their size and market dominance, these 'super' nursery chains are able to compete in a funding environment where the government grant to childcare providers does not cover the cost of providing the care.

There is a stark and revealing contrast between Busy Bees expanding into south-Asia with the acquisition of 60 nurseries and a training college (Nursery World 2015d) and that of the reports by many nurseries and early years care providers that they are struggling to provide the current level of funded entitlement for three and four year olds due to chronic underfunding of the scheme (Nursery World 2014a). The top 25 nursery chains provide over 81,000 childcare places and the language of consolidation, acquisitions, buy-outs and mergers dominates the regular updates of nursery chains in *Nursery World*. The concentration and privatisation of much of the childcare market has considerably changed the way that childcare is organised and delivered in Britain, as well as transferred millions of pounds of government funding directly to private profit-making businesses.

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The reorganisation of reproductive labour and of women's work more broadly has brought about considerable transformations to who and how children are cared for. In many respects, the significant increases in maternal employment that have been central to the development and success of neoliberalism have created and been created by an ever-growing childcare market. However, the emphasis on flexible and affordable childcare has also produced the continued devaluing and downward pressure on childcare



workers wages and conditions alongside a concentration of provision by large-scale corporations and transference of government funding to the private sector. The discourse of choice continues to play a powerful role in producing the realities of women's work both inside and outside the home.

It is useful to further develop the argument posited by Duncan *et al.*, (2004) that people do not view care simply as a constraint on paid work, nor do they view it as a limit to their potential for maximum personal gain. In opposition to the neoliberal assumption of economic rationality as the basis for human behaviour, Duncan *et al.*, argue that parents in fact feel "morally obligated to care and often wish to do so" (2004:2). The point is not that care is unproblematic or that care is somehow gender neutral, in that it is important to consider the role that gender socialisation plays in who and how much different parents feel obligated to care. However, it is to argue for a re-reading and revaluation of care, as a site that offers a potential space of resistance and rejection of the logics of the neoliberal adult worker model.

Central to the repositioning of care as a site of resistance needs to be a recognition of the gendered and racialised restructuring of the labour market since the emergence of neoliberalism. Interrogating both work and care highlights the various interlocking and contingent processes that were central to the rise of neoliberalism and women's increased entry into the labour market. Silvia Federici (forthcoming) contends that the narrow framing of the economic crises of the 1970s as a labour crisis produces a reductive analysis. She argues that such arguments obscure the structural crisis facing post-war capitalist economies, which were the result of a unique cycle of struggles. The struggles that built throughout the twentieth century and culminated in the 1960s with the anti-colonial struggle and the struggle for Black Power in the United States undermined the labour hierarchies on which capitalism had built its power. It is within this context that she argues we need to contextualise women's increased entry into the labour movement. She posits that the paradox of women's massive entrance into the waged workforce, in the US and Europe, coincided with the most decisive assault on workers' rights since the 1920s, one that would change, forever perhaps, the face of the industrial landscape in these regions. Her argument offers a powerful corrective to the dominant liberal feminist politics that continues to prioritise

gender equality in the workforce, particularly gender pay equality, without taking seriously the significant hierarchies that exist between women — particularly the experiences of women of colour and working-class women in the labour-market.

A number of contradictions that emerge from women's increased entrance into waged work become clear when the two terrains of work and care are brought into dialogue with each other. The first is that, in re-reading care as a site of resistance and as a critique of the adult worker model, one does not want to inadvertently rehearse the narratives that set mothers who 'work' up against those who 'care', especially considering that for many women their waged work provides them with the resources to be able to care for children. The second is that any revaluation of care needs to pay attention to the historical processes in which reproduction became spatially, politically and economically separated from production with the emergence and rise of capitalism. Attempts to revalue care need to do so without recourse to discourses that re-naturalise and essentialise non-commodified forms of reproduction. By paying attention not only to the histories of reproduction and its function within capitalism in producing labour-power, but also the critiques by previous feminist movements about the gendered and racialised organisation of reproduction within family structures, we are able to begin to disentangle current feminist efforts from the logics of neoliberalism. By tracing how choice is constructed within neoliberal discourses of work and care, it becomes possible to see how choice organises parent's decisions and actions that are not in fact choices, specifically those instances when choice is structured by necessity and need.

The emergence of 24-hour care in Britain has been discursively organised around the idea of giving working mothers more flexibility and choice. This speaks to more generalised processes that have reorganised care within an economic rational framework to maximise and structure women's paid work. However, tensions continue to animate the dynamics between the childcare market, modes of governance that seeks to extend and disseminate "market values to all institutions and social action" (Brown 2003:7) and that of a population that does not necessarily act in individualist and economically rational ways when it comes to their choices about work and care. Locating

the problem of care within the discourse of choice is useful in that it becomes possible to hear the counter narratives that different parents, particularly different mothers, produce to negotiate the terrains of work and care. Furthermore, in locating care within the discourse of choice it is possible to interrogate the continued interventions and efforts of government to reaffirm the centrality of the adult worker model as the basis for family and childcare policy. This is a different argument than the one Fraser (2013) pursues when she claims that feminist critique of the male breadwinner and female carer family wage system has served to legitimate 'flexible capitalism'.

In thinking through the problem of the emergence of 24-hour care, specifically how the present came to be understood in the way that it is, and specifically what is new and not so new in the organisation of work and care in neoliberal Britain, I want to return to a text that Denise Riley, who was active in the Women's Liberation Movement, wrote in 1983 about the construction of childcare. For much of the post-war period her assertion that childcare "has the ring of something closed-off, finished, which some people - mostly mothers - know all too much about, and from which other people shy prudently away" (1983a: 135) indeed rang true and expressed the privatised, devalued and feminised organisation of women's work and care. She writes "the very term 'child-care' has a dispiriting and dutiful heaviness hanging over it which resists attempts to give it glamour or militance alike. It is as short on colour and incisiveness as the business of negotiating the wet kerb with a pushchair" (1983a: 135). Up until the late 1990s childcare in Britain was certainly an issue that remained both an issue of indifference to government and was definitely short on colour.

However, the state-led transformations of early childhood education and care and the creation of a multi-billion pound childcare market has meant that childcare needs now to be understood as possessing some colour. Crucially, both female labour-power and childcare occupy a central and visible place in national economic and social policy. Childcare was described by Labour MP Yvette Cooper as "essential infrastructure for a modern economy" (Nursery World 2015c). The changes to the organisation of work and care that are reflected in this newfound colour childcare now possesses have both enabled significant social change and been produced by it. However, as much as

things have changed, childcare remains something “which some people — most mothers — know all too much about” not least considering the disproportionate concentration of women workers (96 percent) in the care sector and the continued role that mothers have as primary carers of their children.

It is also clear that childcare didn’t come to occupy such a central position within economic and social policy simply because neoliberalism needed more female labour. Not only would such a conclusion be reductive in its analysis of how capitalism functions, but neither would it pay sufficient attention to the previous moments in history where chronic labour shortages were not solved by increasing female labour participation. Nor would it pay attention to the intersecting emergence and development of 1970s feminism within the same timeframe as neoliberalism. Indeed, it has been feminism and neoliberalism, operating on different registers and scales that have reorganised reproduction and women’s work.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Invisible Hands of the Market: Choice, Labour and Luck

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#### 5.1 From Rights to Choice: Encounter #4

I attended the 'In Conversation with the Women's Liberation Movement: Intergenerational Histories of Second Wave Feminism' conference at the British Library in 2013. Also in attendance was my then six-month old second child, who was strapped to my chest in a sling. I noted at the time that, unlike the feminist events that this conference was inviting us to remember, there was no childcare or crèche provided and no one else had brought their children. To my relief, my son slept through most of the event, waking only to breastfeed and doze back off to sleep. The format of the event consisted of younger feminists interviewing and hosting a public conversation with women who had been active in the 1970s Women's Liberation Movement. During the Reproductive Choices session, Denise Riley was asked about how women "back then" organised around reproductive choice. To which she answered that feminists in the 1970s didn't really talk about reproductive choice. She went on to explain that the language of choice was not the way that feminists spoke about or imagined reproduction, reminding the audience that it had been reproductive freedoms and rights that had framed feminist demands, conversations and campaigns in 1970s. The comment struck me as an important one. In that it gestured towards the considerable distance that has developed between a feminist movement that previously fought for women's freedom and rights and that of a feminist politics that aims to provide women with more choice.

In March 2015 *Mumsnet*, in partnership with the advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi<sup>19</sup> released the research report *Motherhood: It's Not a Job* (2015)<sup>20</sup>. In media articles that accompanied the release of the report, Richard Huntington, the chief strategy officer at Saatchi & Saatchi, said: "Advertisers are still stuck in the rut of seeing mums in the role of cook, cleaner and nurse" (McVeigh 2015). He continues: "We need to focus more on the fun and silliness of motherhood, and less on the drudgery, if we are to reflect the reality of modern mothers' aspirations" (McVeigh 2015). The report constructs women with children as performing several interlocking emotional roles<sup>21</sup> that are differentiated and prioritised over the 'drudgery' of domestic work.

Motherhood, like many other aspects of life under neoliberalism is presented as an experience, in this instance an emotional journey. The image of motherhood that is produced reflects the neoliberal construction of motherhood as both naturalised and as a privatised consumer experience, in which "nothing can replace the time mum spends with her kids" and that the role of the market is to "give her time back in her day" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015). One respondent in the report is quoted as saying: "Although I do agree, brands can help us spend the time more effectively with children, I feel it is the love that does everything" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015). The neoliberal construction of motherhood as a naturalised consumer experience separates the emotional relations of caring for a child from the drudgery of domestic

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<sup>19</sup> During the run-up to the 1979 general election, Saatchi & Saatchi designed an advertising campaign poster for the Conservative Party. The poster's design was a picture of a snaking dole queue outside an unemployment office, with the slogan 'Labour Isn't Working' above it. At the time unemployment was high by post-war standards: between 5 and 6 percent, though the unemployment rate has remained at or above these levels for most of the UK's subsequent history. At the time the campaign was viewed a success and the Conservatives won the election with a 43-seat majority with the party leader, Margaret Thatcher becoming Prime Minister.

<sup>20</sup> The research methods for the report include conducting quantitative research through a nationally representative survey of 1,022 mums in the UK (responses gathered in December 2014). Saatchi & Saatchi also conducted two Mumsnet panel surveys consisting of more than 1,800 parents. For the purpose of the research findings, mums are defined as women with children under the age of 16.

<sup>21</sup> The eight emotional roles of motherhood defined in the report are: Carer (being there and in the moment), Safehouse (being there no matter what), Coach (being there when you aren't there), Fan (being on the receiving end and enjoying the mark they make), Partner in Crime (being down and dirty), Rule Breaker (not always being the disciplinarian), Friend (being on the inside), Hero (being who you want your child to be) (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015).

work, to the extent that the domestic tasks and activities associated with being a 'cook', 'cleaner' and 'nurse' are overwhelmingly erased from the subjectivity of neoliberal motherhood. In the instances that the domestic work of reproduction does reappear, it does so within the context of the market, as work that is devalued; that needs to be minimised, organised through a series of 'choices' and as a question of time management.

That motherhood is as performative as gender (Butler 1999) doesn't make either concept less interesting or less real. This chapter considers motherhood as situated within the terms of the particularities of lived experience, social arrangements and the norms and discourses that constitute the 'myths of motherhood' and suggests that our knowledge of motherhood, of being mothers and being mothered is in a constant state of contestation, negotiation and at times, crisis. It is in this sense, that I argue that the apparatus of motherhood is unstable; in that both the elements that organise and arrange motherhood and motherhood itself have changed considerably throughout the development of capitalism. This chapter investigates the network of discursive and non-discursive formations that are established between the elements of motherhood and the political economy of reproduction and examines motherhood as an historical strategic, formation within the rationalities of neoliberalism in Britain.

The analysis draws on several different discursive articulations of motherhood including transcripts from the research interviews I conducted with mothers and childminders (all of whom were also mothers) in London, as well as extracts from the *Nursery World* column "Working Mum" and the *Mumsnet* and Saatchi & Saatchi report *Motherhood: It's Not A Job* (2015). In addition, two semi-autobiographical books *The Secret World of the Working Mother* (2009) written by Fiona Millar and *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality* (2011) written by Rebecca Asher are also included. As in previous chapters, the texts are analysed discursively and are examined concurrently, woven together in such a way that reflects how they reinforce, disrupt and produce each other. These different voices of motherhood, drawn from interview transcripts, semi-autobiographical texts on motherhood and an anonymous column are analysed as illustrative texts of discourse. They are in no way intended to operate as a representative sample of mothers in

contemporary neoliberal Britain. In relation to the mothers I interviewed, a small number were working as childminders in the borough of Brent in northwest London and the others all lived in northeast London. Of the mothers in northeast London, all were in stable relationships and the majority were married. Three of the women interviewed in northeast London were the primary earners in their families and, of the remaining 12, four worked part-time and eight were supported financially by their husband or partners' wages. However, it is useful to note that all of the eight women who were not currently employed considered themselves to be either 'on a break from work' or 'on maternity leave' from previous professional careers due to caring for relatively young children. Comments such as "so, I never wanted to be a kept woman, I never wanted to rely on someone else's money. I don't like it much really" (Julie, 49 - one child aged 6 years) express a common discomfort in not earning a wage that was shared by the majority of the women who were not currently employed.

The chapter is structured into three sections. The first section continues the discussion of reproduction as a labour process and reframes such labour as relational work of repair, maintenance and care. I argue that several processes of separation occur through the binary constructions of motherhood that, on the one hand, allocate value and positive meaning to certain aspects of reproduction while, on the other hand, devalue and narrow the experience of other tasks and activities. The binary of maternal labour is investigated in conversation with the processes of commodification that characterise contemporary everyday life. Moreover, commodification is considered within the matrix of how reproduction is valued, distributed and where it is located. These insights connect to the previous discussion in Chapter Three of the dual characteristics of reproducing labour-power, in which the unevenness, tensions and conflicts that structure the work of reproduction are considered to be central. The second part of the chapter considers the interrelation between neoliberal rationality and the naturalisation of the gendered division of labour, in which women remain "disproportionately responsible for those who cannot be responsible for themselves" (Brown, 2015:105). In the final section of the chapter, the discourse of choice is examined alongside that of luck, specifically 'being lucky' or 'feeling lucky' to have the time to be a mother. The chapter concludes that neoliberalism compels subjects to



undertake planning, and that it is through the operation of choice, specifically “responsibilization” (Brown 2015) and the dismantling of the public provision of social reproduction that an older story of gender subordination is not only intensified but also transformed.

## 5.2 The Labour of Reproduction

A recurrent theme in this research has been the question of the labour of reproduction. In the course of studying how reproduction functions under neoliberalism, focusing on how reproduction is lived and experienced and exploring how its organisation relates to the production of the subjectivity of motherhood, the materiality and embodied characteristics of reproduction emerged in uneven yet visible ways. The mothers that I interviewed expressed different ways of accounting for the time, value and distribution of the labour of reproduction in their families. When we examine how different aspects of reproduction are valued it is useful to remember that values, the process of valuing, and creating meaning are subjective (Graeber 2006)<sup>22</sup>. Not only are such questions subjective but also they are produced historically and are in a constant state of being constructed and deconstructed. When Pat Thane reminds us that “it was not commonplace for children of any class to be cared for exclusively by their mothers before the Second World War” (2011b:1), it is a reminder that how we consider motherhood and, importantly, what work is required to be a good mother, is neither stable nor inherent to the performance of mothering.

If you saw my parent’s house when we were growing up and my parent’s friends even more than my mum, as she was quite relaxed— in certain respects, their houses were immaculate. So, when I say I do the housework, I clean the bathroom once a week, I Hoover once or twice a week. I feed. I cook... I do most of the work (Isabelle, 35 - two children aged 5, and 2 years).

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<sup>22</sup> David Graeber (2006) outlines three key areas of thought that converge on the term ‘value’ - ‘values’ in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life; ‘value’ in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them; ‘value’ in the linguistic sense, which goes back to structural linguistics and might be most simply glossed as ‘meaningful difference’

Isabelle, whose husband works full-time in the charity sector, is conscious of the gendered division of labour in her household. At the same time, she is also aware that her standards of housework differ in comparison to the work that her mother and her mother's friends used to do to keep their houses "immaculate". Unsurprisingly, given the topics that were discussed, in many of the interviews women made remarks, comments and told stories of their own mothers and their own childhoods.

My mum and I are very different people, as I said, my mum is quite chaotic. I think I take after my dad more, also mum had a really different experience [of motherhood], because she got pregnant at university. So she was quite advanced in going to university in the first place and quite out there in getting pregnant. "Thankfully"— and I put that in inverted commas — the guy married her. So even though it only lasted a year, I think, had he not, she would have been in a very difficult position (Hannah, 40 – two children 3 years, and 5 weeks).

In moving from the present to the past and back again, these narratives open up motherhood as a "historically located experience that is nevertheless mediated within families — between grandmothers, mothers and daughters who, in turn, locate themselves as members of wider generations of women" (Thomson et al. 2011:10).

I think of my mother who stayed at home and now... my mother passed way, so there is a lot of emotional stuff in that regard. I always wanted to stay at home with the kids (Jenny, 39 - two children aged 3 years, and 8 months).

There is an interesting tension and sensitivity to how several of the women discuss questions of biographical time, which they experience both as individuals and within their families and, at the same time, as a collective sense of historical time as experienced by generations and relationships between their generation and their mothers.

In some ways I feel like things have gone backwards. Compared to my mum, she was a single mum for a while and, kind of, she— she had more freedom, to choose and change paths (Grace, 41 - two children aged 11, and 7 years).

In response to interview questions about how care and domestic work is organised in their households, many of the women described differentiated labour processes, in which the work of motherhood was characterised as

involving the tedious but necessary drudgery of domestic housework alongside the affective and emotional aspects of raising children.

Oh the tedious drudgery. Oh god, it is the worst part to being a mum. And I am not particularly house-proud. You know, I do the bare minimum, so that it is not going to cause anyone to be ill. It's the, you know, just making breakfast, clearing it up. Making lunch, clearing it up. Making dinner, clearing it up and then making a dinner for us. Endless. Pointless. Awful. I hate it (Julie, 49 - one child aged 6 years).

For Julie the tedious drudgery of certain aspects of reproductive labour captures the affective aspects of care and domestic work that are never-ending, repetitive and demanding. No matter how many times you wash, fold and put away the clothes or wipe down the kitchen benches, the work reappears. It is, in this sense, that reproductive work can be thought of, not as being goal orientated but, instead, as involving the work of repair and maintenance (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012). The narration of some aspects of Julie's life as tedious drudgery operates as a moment of separation, one that is different from her account of her only son who "is completely marvellous and obviously the best child in the world".

In exploring the production of the subjectivity of motherhood within its historical specificities it is useful to examine how such affective divisions function. Through focusing on what is said, as well as what is not said with regard to the labour of reproduction, it is useful to interrogate how divisions and separations are maintained and how some reproductive activities are produced as desirable and others as drudgery.

I do all the laundry, which doesn't sound like much, but it is a lot of work (Claire, 30 - one child aged 2 years).

I don't find the laundry that onerous, [partner] does his own laundry and ironing, so I would do maybe two or three loads a week (Julie, 49 - one child aged 6 years).

The intersection between how these women value, experience and distribute specific aspects of reproductive labour emerges in the different ways that laundry is spoken about. For Claire doing the laundry is "a lot of work" possibly because she does all the laundry for a household of three. In contrast, Julie doesn't find it onerous and points out that her partner does his own

laundry and ironing. The different ways that people experience the same task or activity is a useful reminder that it is not the actual activity that provides meaning and value, but instead the social relations in which the activity occurs (Glucksmann 1995).

At the same time as being necessary and unavoidable, there is also a certain element of flexibility to the spatiality of reproduction. Continuing with the example of the laundry, perhaps one of the reasons that Julie doesn't find doing the laundry too "onerous" is because of the specific organisation of laundry in her household.

Also we really don't wash sheets and towels here. We put them— we stuff them into a massive hold all, take them to a launderette and they come back beautiful, clean, dry, folded; boiled in the machines, so they are really clean. Folded up, take them out, put them away and it's like, £12. It's almost cheaper than doing it yourself (Julie, 49 - one child aged 6 years).

For Chloe spending "family time" with the children and "doing nice things with them" (Chloe, 36 - three children aged 4, 3, and 1 year old) is expressed as positive, desirable and rewarding and delineated from the daily mundane domestic work of laundry or cleaning. It is also a question of values that organises the construction of motherhood in *Motherhood: It's Not a Job*. The report concludes by arguing that "Motherhood is fundamentally about being, not doing" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015). The values of motherhood are neatly recast as 'being', suggesting a state of stasis and essentialism. The split between the 'nice' emotional relational work, and that of physical and manual labour is one that can be argued to inadvertently replicate the Cartesian mind-body dualism (Wolkowitz 2006). Here it is useful to return to the argument of Wolkowitz in which she posits that when we separate the emotional work of care, work that is often valued and rewarded with higher status, our understanding of physical aspects of care is "concomitantly narrowed and identified with mindlessness and mechanical activity" (2006:147). The conceptualisation of manual, physical work as different, as "tedious drudgery", separates it from the more desirable, valued and skilled emotional care aspects of reproduction. Developing the argument further would be to also highlight how such a separation complements and further

reinforces the division of mental and manual labour, a division that was produced by and produced the rise of the professional-managerial class.

From a critical feminist perspective, it is necessary to find ways of overcoming these separations, primarily because conceiving of and desiring only the emotional, affective and 'nicer' aspects of reproduction contributes to the continued devaluation of certain aspects of reproduction. Which is also to stress that such separations are maintained through a regulation of bodies and relations of labour that disproportionately affects women and people of colour. Specifically, the devaluation of the dirty, manual and so-called unskilled work of cleaning and domestic maintenance, is work that has not only historically been gendered but also racialised (Palmer 1989, Glenn 1992). As such, it is necessary to remain critical of attempts to create an idealised motherhood and to insist that making and remaking people and, conversely, being reproduced by others is not necessarily rewarding and comforting.

One way of resisting attempts to create an idealised motherhood is to investigate the function of the binary that separates the affective emotional work of care from the physical, manual elements of reproduction. For example, how the regular cleaning of the kitchen is spoken about and experienced as "tedious drudgery" compared to say the "family time" of snuggling down with one's child in bed to read a story. To be clear, this separation has a specific and historical function within neoliberalism, in that such binary divisions are not trans-historical or universal. Though it is discussed in more depth in subsequent chapters, it is worth briefly noting that the organisation of motherhood in previous regimes functioned differently.

As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7, during the post-war years the discourse of devotion and the naturalness of mothering were central to producing reproductive work as women's destiny. Elements of the post-war construction of motherhood are also visible in the struggles in which feminists in the 1970s "created a political space in which women were able to consider the whys and wherefores of motherhood" (Rowbotham 1989b:83). In opening up such a space of resistance, it was the construction of motherhood as women's inevitable and desired destiny that feminism challenged. Consequently feminists insisted that motherhood "must be freely chosen and socially transformed" (Rowbotham 1989b:83).

Within the contemporary organisation of reproduction, the subject position of 'mother' remains a powerful ideal of womanhood under neoliberalism and central to how young women construct their identities (Jacques and Radtke 2012). However, the separations and divisions operate differently than they did under previous regimes. The neoliberal construction of motherhood is organised through a discourse of motherhood as an experience, specifically, as an individualised choice. Women are told they should enjoy and value, in particular, "the meaningful relationship they have with their children" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015) and they are told what is drudgery, in particular domestic work. Furthermore, the affective divisions of the good and bad aspects that organise and maintain motherhood are separations that ensure the continuity of the devaluation of some aspects of reproduction; those aspects that roughly correspond to 'manual' rather than emotional or affective labour.

One of the problems with the production of such a binary is that it makes it difficult to acknowledge and sufficiently engage with those affective emotional aspects of care that are supposed to be 'nicer', but that are experienced as neither rewarding nor comforting. For instance, how boring and mundane it can be to read the same story night after night or the considerable conflict and upset caused when children don't go to sleep or wake continuously through the night. For Jenny, whose husband works full-time in the creative industries, there is a considerable tension between her commitment to being a stay-at-home mother, "I want to be the one who creates the experiences for my child, I want to be the one there loving them" and the physically demanding work involved in raising two small children in London.

I have found [motherhood] exhausting, really exhausting... it can wear you down a bit. A three year old can be a tough boss... I'm a late mother, 36, and 39, and there is a lot of life and disposable income and selfishness before that. I am very tired all the time. I feel a little bit trapped (Jenny, 39yrs - two children aged 3 years, and 8 months).

Complicating the experiences of reproduction makes it possible to highlight the contradictions that exist between the normative construction of mothering and the lived experience of reproduction under neoliberalism. In addition,

when we consider that reproduction is a process of the co-production of subjectivities (to the extent that the child reproduces the parent at the same time as the parent reproduces the child), it is useful to examine how the devaluation of much of the domestic work of reproduction functions via the naturalisation of the gendered division of labour. Through complicating the easy presentation of the so-called 'good' and the 'bad' aspects of motherhood, it is also possible to give voice to maternal ambivalence which acknowledges the subjective force of "being loved so much and blamed so intensely" (Parker 1996, cited in Thomson et al. 2011:5).

I have to admit that when people say, 'I just love being a mother, how much do you love it?' I am not sure that I do. I don't hate it, but I wouldn't say this is my life's calling. It's interesting, as I always thought I would be like that, I still have a bit of that ambivalence (Brittany, 32 - one child 3 months).

One way to read Brittany's ambivalence concerning motherhood is an expression of how neoliberal subjectivities are "passively resisted" (Scott 1985). The emergence of passive forms of resistance suggests that quotient resistance to motherhood is privatised within neoliberal mothering. In other words, motherhood now lacks the public spaces of resistance and contestation of 1970s feminism, from the communal laundries on the high street to the consciousness-raising groups of 1970s and 1980s.

I definitely feel like I couldn't be a full-time mum...that is not what I want... I would probably find it a bit too boring. Not to say that being a mum isn't a worthwhile thing, obviously it is. But, I think I would feel more fulfilled being a mum in addition to something else other than being a mum (Claire, 30 - one child aged 2 years).

While Claire's ambivalence is directed more towards being a full-time stay-at-home mother, her strategies for dealing with what she considers to be the boring, unfulfilling aspects of motherhood are individualised in that she intends to pursue an academic career that she describes as stimulating and a place of ideas. It is also useful to add to the collection of behaviours that constitute resistance to motherhood the act of not having children. Due to the multiple reasons women end up not having children, it is not entirely clear how many of the current 25 percent of women who reach the age of 45 having never given birth (ONS 2013a) do so as a rejection of motherhood. However,

considering the increasing availability of assisted reproductive technology, we can assume a considerable number.

Dwelling for a moment on the question of resistance and ambivalences towards motherhood, it is useful to consider what is not being said in the interviews. While many of the women interviewed identified certain aspects of motherhood that were not enjoyable or satisfying such as “oh the tedious drudgery. It’s the worst bit of being a mum” (Julie, 49 - one child aged 6 years) or other’s like Brittany and Jenny who were able to express feelings of being trapped or ambivalence, what was not expressed was any strong antipathy or rejection of motherhood. Perhaps the strongest critique of contemporary motherhood that emerged from the data was expressed as resentment and appears in Asher’s account of her experiences of the first 12-months of motherhood.

My life became unrecognisable to me. The uncertainly I’d felt about having a child had vanished. I loved my son. But a new emotional complexity took its place: despite this love I came to resent motherhood itself (Asher 2011:3).

While she characterises many of her experiences as “head-pounding boring” the main thrust of her resentment towards motherhood is the unequal distribution of care and domestic work between parents and that “becoming a mother entails such a profound break from our past lives and expectations”(Asher 2011:6). After 12 months at home caring for her son, Asher writes of her return to work: “I was definitely ready to earn my own money, rebuild a social life and have a place in the world again” (Asher 2011:6). Her resentment of motherhood is also evident in her characterisation of the reproductive work of mothering as not having a place in the world.

Perhaps one way of reading the overwhelming silence of antipathy towards motherhood is to think through which subjects are accessible when conducting research about motherhood and sites such as the domestic, the home and care work. In other words, perhaps women with children who are uncomfortable with or have an aversion to the subjectivity of motherhood are situated in such a way that the framing of the research produces them as inaccessible. Another way of reading the lack of antipathy towards motherhood is to consider such silence in relation to the loud hostility and



opposition to motherhood expressed by women in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain. It is interesting to consider how the lack of antipathy speaks to the production of neoliberal motherhood as an experience and one that women are increasingly constructed as having 'chosen'. In the last section of this chapter I return to the discourse of choice and how it arranges and organises neoliberal motherhood.

### **5.3 The Distribution of Value and Gendered Labour**

The complex ways in which we value (and devalue) reproductive labour cannot however be adequately addressed by simply making reproductive labour visible. Making reproduction visible is a necessary first step, but it is not sufficient to confront the question of value, as reproduction is more than a simple to-do list of tasks and activities. In addition to the binary of the tedious drudgery as compared to the affective, emotional 'family time', one of the other responses that emerged from interview questions about the organisation of care and domestic work was the issue of how reproductive labour was distributed within the household. For some of the women interviewed the question of the distribution of reproductive labour was a politicised issue, in that it was clear that considerable time and negotiations had occurred in shaping who did what in the house.

In general I do the majority of the cooking and all the laundry, probably do all the laundry...[Partner] does really good vacuuming, he will blitz the bathroom and blitz the kitchen. He takes the rubbish out, the recycling. We will both fold laundry. I refuse to iron his shirts (Jenny, 39yrs - two children aged 3 years and 8months).

The role of negotiation between couples with regard to care and domestic work was noticeable in many of the ways that the women narrated the allocation of tasks in their households. What is also interesting is the presentation of negotiation by Marie (32 - three children aged 4 years, 2 years, and 7 months). She noted: "I find it tiring, the constant negotiation". Marie agreed that the time spent deciding and discussing who should do what was itself labour. In some interviews, there was a latent feminist sensibility to many of the comments and remarks that the women made, with many, though certainly not all of the women expressing dissatisfaction with how the

distribution of domestic work occurred in their households. In so far as the issue of the distribution was a politicised one for many of the women, it did not necessarily equate to progressive or equitable arrangements.

Yeah, so I do 95 percent of it. In theory, he is supposed to do the bathrooms. But I do everything else (Grace, 41 - two children aged 11 and 7 years).

In Grace's household not only does she do the vast majority of domestic work as well as the childcare for her two young sons, but due to her husband's long hours of work, there is not much time during the week for their relationship. "We don't really cross over that much during the week. It is at the weekend that we try and put it back together somehow" (Grace, 41 - two children aged 11 and 7 years). For Samantha, whose partner is an artist and works part-time for the NHS, the issue of how reproductive work is distributed was articulated clearly as a matter of gender equality. In addition, in Samantha's household the allocation of various activities and tasks (such as putting the kids to bed, picking kids up from school) did not necessarily conform to traditional gender roles, though she does note that she regularly takes on arranging more of her daughters' social world, such as attending children's birthday parties and maintaining relationships with other parents. One of the reasons she gives for the more equitable allocation of reproductive work is her partner's part-time work hours. At the same time, she was also aware of how certain things had changed in terms of family routines and allocation of housework with the recent birth of her second child.

It is not quite 50/50, the cleaning is 50/50. I do more of the cooking. I definitely do more of the social world stuff. [Partner] does a lot of picking up from school and putting to bed (Samantha, 34yrs, two children aged 5 and 5 weeks old).

For other women, it was their status of being stay-at-home mums that organised the distribution of reproductive tasks. Nicole (32 - two children, twins aged 2 years) who does "90 percent of the food, shopping cleaning" sees reproductive work as being part of her "role". Even though she referred to such tasks as her role, Nicole didn't think of the housework as her priority, instead she prioritised the relational aspects of care in raising her twin daughters.

However, the intersection of the distribution of reproduction with how reproduction is valued is a complex question. At the level of generalisation, the historical organisation of reproduction under capitalism has disproportionately constructed reproductive labour as women's work and distributed it between women in the domestic sphere, including between women who receive a wage for the work and those who do not. The question of the distribution of reproductive labour has never been confined to a simple allocation of tasks and activities between individual members of the family, it also has and continues to include the tasks and activities that households contract out to others, either work that occurs in the employer's home (for example by servants, domestic cleaners or nannies) or outside of it (such as in laundry services, state run childcare centres, private therapists or swimming lessons).

Julie's previous comment about using a laundrette service and that "it's almost cheaper than doing it yourself" brings to the fore the multiple and, at times, contradictory value systems that structure both the distribution of reproductive labour and people's experiences of the work. On the one hand, the relative cheapness of considerable amounts of commodified reproduction is contextualised by the possibility of doing the work yourself and, crucially, by neoliberal reforms to the labour market that have ensured a plentiful supply of low-paid, non-unionised workers. On the other hand, this do-it-yourself possibility is also structured by who has the skills, time and desire to do the work, as well as a concurrent devaluation of the work. Within neoliberal motherhood, the question of time, specifically the time available for mothering, is often constructed as limited. In *Motherhood: It's Not A Job* the question of time is directly addressed: "Time is the most important and valued factor in playing [the] emotional roles [of motherhood] and building her relationship with her children, and yet, with everything she takes on, her time is limited" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015).

Julie's decision to have the sheets and towels cleaned by an outside laundry service also suggests that there is a cost-benefit calculus occurring, in so far as it is a particular comparison made possible by the economic value of reproductive labour versus what else one could be doing. In this instance, 'drudgery' is conceived as both a particular and necessary aspect of

reproductive labour and one that has a negative economic value, however it is also work that, in many instances, people happily pay to be rid of. Whereas under previous regimes (as will be outlined in Chapter Seven), reproductive labour was constructed as women's domestic destiny, undertaken out of love and obligation, under neoliberalism a shift occurs through which subjects are encouraged and, at times, compelled to approach all aspects of life within the framework of calculating risk, self-investment and as a subject of value-added human capital.

I underestimated how much we were going to have to clean. London is friggin dusty. Um, so we are going to hire a cleaner. I feel like we would much rather spend time together and [husband] with the child, then we would be spending five hours cleaning [on the weekend] (Brittany, 32 – one child 3 months).

Internalised self-regulation such as: 'Is this the best use of my time?' structures how different aspects of reproduction are concurrently valued and devalued. It is a process that works to configure the neoliberal mother as an ensemble of entrepreneurial and investment human capital. The question for Brittany is not only how to manage her own time but also how to manage the limited family time that her husband, herself and their child get to spend together. A common theme in the majority of households where one partner worked full-time was the feeling of a real lack of time during the week.

I've only been back at work full-time for just over a month and I'm exhausted and with getting in at night at 7 or 8pm and the weekends fly by. I am definitely getting a cleaner (Alice, 44yrs: two children, twins aged 7yrs).

The necessity of reproduction can be thought of as labour that is, on the one hand, unimportant, in that it has been devalued and, on the other, also important, as something household members just have to get out of the way. "Getting a cleaner" is one answer, albeit an individualised and gendered answer that relies on a certain level of income, to the problem of not wanting to do the cleaning or not having the time to do so. The lack of time that people have to do reproductive labour, in particular the lack of time that working mothers have, is the result of their increased time spent in waged employment and the continued uneven distribution of domestic work in the home. In this sense 'family time' under neoliberalism is produced as scarce.

Such a scarcity compares to the considerable and, at times, excessive production of time spent with the family that some women — mainly white women — experienced in the post-war years in Britain.

It is the experience of reproductive work as necessary yet constructed as undesirable and, specifically, not a good use of one's time, that has provided the basis for much of its commodification. This point is a crucial one; it connects to the previous discussion of (some) women's ambivalence towards motherhood and also the emergence of passive forms of resistance to the neoliberal subjectivity of motherhood. In many ways, moments of resistance towards neoliberal motherhood have been privatised and also structured and limited by the dismantling of the welfare state and the privatisation of public provision of social reproduction. The processes and practices of neoliberal reform and restructuring can be argued to have reconfigured the responsibility, cost and the risks associated with social reproduction away from the state and towards the individualised family. In this way, it is possible to read commodification as a site of resistance to the partial re-privatisation of reproductive labour.

Commodification as resistance — albeit a mode of resistance that is limited, uneven and at times, even exploitative — is a mode of rejecting the neoliberal notion that it should be the family and, by extension women, who should absorb the extra work produced by the restructuring of the welfare state. In contrast to the 1970s, subjects under neoliberalism seek out individual solutions; choices that are limited to those options available through either the market or the family. Commodified reproductive solutions have become increasingly necessary as the state reorganises the public provision of reproductive labour and, crucially, as dual income households become the norm through necessity. Added into this matrix of passive forms of resistance and uneven individualised private solutions is the increasing inequality of incomes that operates to reinforce processes of commodification.

#### **5.4 The Spaces and Times of Reproduction**

The commodification of reproduction is also a question of the spatiality of labour. The reproductive work of care, specifically paying for someone else to

look after children (the argument can also be extended to elder care) operates somewhat differently than other aspects of commodified reproductive labour. Care work is different to, say, cleaning the toilet, vacuuming or doing the laundry. These tasks are all work that are central to being able to care but they are not as time bound. The relational and embodied aspects of care means that, for most people, they need someone else to ‘mind the baby’ while they work. The question of spatiality emerges in so far as relations of care under capitalism are structured by the specific mode of surplus extraction that overwhelmingly relies on the separation of individuals from their families and household during the moments of surplus extraction, since surplus is extracted from the individual alone rather than from a family or household (Woods cited in LeBaron 2010:893). In response to this separation, women with small children like Isabelle quoted below, often develop employment strategies that attempt to bridge the distance between work and care:

I just found the idea of starting a new job in London where I would be probably dropping kids off at 8am and coming home at 6pm, really really horrible. For me, I really didn’t want to do it. And I wanted to spend more time with them. The idea of being that stressed frightened me. So, after about a year with [second child] we decided I would go down the childminder route. And then it was just easier to register as a nanny. Yeah, [second child] comes with, it’s three days a week (Isabelle, 35 - two children aged 5 and 2 years)

Working as a childminder has been one strategy that women with dependent children who “wanted to spend more time with them” have developed to be able to both care and to earn an income, although it is often a low income. It is also an employment strategy for older women, often grandmothers, who are able to take care of their grandchildren alongside other children and earn an income.

I have been registered [as a childminder] for four years, but I have always looked after children — I have got five of my own (Joy, 59 – five children, one grandchild, aged 2 years).

In addition to the income that working as a childminder offers, the unwaged care work of grandparents, specifically that of grandmothers, is a crucial element of how reproductive work is organised within neoliberalism.

My husband and I work flexibly and this, together with our son's nursery place and invaluable help from our own parents, means that we are both able to pursue our work while sharing the care of our son (Asher 2011:6).

Almost two thirds (63 percent) of grandparents with grandchildren under 16 look after their grandchildren, with 19 percent of grandmothers providing at least 10 hours of care a week compared to 14 percent of grandfathers (Wellard 2011). However, more recent research shows that both the number of children looked after by grandparents and the length of time that grandparents spend on childcare is increasing, with the informal childcare provided by grandparents valued at £7.3billion, up from £3.9billion in 2004 (Brooks 2013). In this way, the 'invaluable' care that grandparents provide, care that is often flexible, or care carried out in atypical hours or overnight extends and intensifies the work of retired workers. However, it also operates to deepen the exploitation of working parents while, at the same time, it compensates for the privatisation of public infrastructure such as affordable, quality childcare provided by the state.

It is also worth briefly noting that the childcare provided by grandparents is care that remains gendered and also occurs within the family. When the public provision of care is privatised, the work and the costs associated with supplying such care is returned to individuals, and disproportionately returned to women. It is in this way, Wendy Brown argues that responsabilization, as the practice and idea of forcing the subject to become a responsible self-investor and self-provider, uniquely penalizes women to the extent that women "remain disproportionately responsible for those who cannot be responsible for themselves" (Brown 2015, 105).

In contrast to the strategy of childminding that allows mothers to combine the world of unwaged care with waged employment, are the experiences of working parents who work outside the home and who need other people to care for their children. Here my focus shifts to working mothers and to families in which all available parents are working full-time; the analysis shifts from the somewhat vague presentation of time pressures as expressed in *Motherhood: Its Not a Job* as "and yet with everything she takes on her time is limited", to focus on the specific issues that are produced at the intersection of waged work and care.

The regular *Nursery World* column “Working Mum” is written by a working mother with two daughters and details the routines, experiences and anxieties of a professional middle-class mother working full-time with one child at primary school and one in full-time nursery. Written in a confessional diary style, as the title would indicate, the tensions and issues of working full-time and juggling childcare are a major theme of the column. In one column, Working Mum expresses her frustration at the lack of information she receives from her four-year daughter when she asks what she’s done at nursery.

It’s such a frustration because I genuinely want to know what my girls have been experiencing while I’ve not been with them. I want to be part of their lives even though I’m at work for a large part of it (Nursery World 2014g:32).

The difficulties in having to work and wanting to be part of her children’s life are clearly and routinely articulated. In another column, Working Mum writes about the problems she encounters as her eldest daughter starts school and the lack of out-school childcare provision. She expresses her frustrations about head teachers who are ideologically opposed to out-of-hours provision and who argue that children are in school for long enough hours. She writes that she agrees with such sentiments but also insists

DD1<sup>23</sup> has coped well in day-care since she was ten months old from 8am to 6pm [and]... I know my situation is not unique. I’m surrounded by households where both parents work and don’t have the support of family nearby (Nursery World 2014h:27).

The assertion by Working Mum that her situation is not unique highlights the considerable transformations that have occurred to how households organise their waged work and care arrangements. The phenomena of dual-earning households, in which both adults work, is no longer an emerging trend; rather it is the overwhelming reality for families in Britain (Dex 2003). In 2014, the number of families in which all adults were working for wages reached 55.3 percent, compared to the 28.8 percent of families that the Office of National Statistics classifies as ‘mixed households’ where one adult member

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<sup>23</sup> DD1 refers to Darling Daughter One, a common abbreviation on parenting forums such as *Mumsnet*



works for wages and the other does not (ONS 2015b). The remaining 15.9 percent of families are households in which no adult is in waged work. Of the 55.3 percent of households in which all adults are working for wages, roughly half are structured around one partner working full-time and the other part-time, with around 25 percent of couples with children both working full-time (Nursery World 2014c:11).

One of the reasons that the adult worker model is often adapted to be a one-and-half worker model is that in families where all available adults work full-time and can't access informal care through grandparents or family networks, children spend on average 50 hours per week in care (not including the travel time to and from nursery or school). With more schools offering 'wrap-around care', the school day is also being extended from 8am–6pm, with breakfast clubs and after-school programs attempting to meet the care needs of working parents. At Russell Hill Road Nursery the hours for a full day of care are 7am–7pm, which equals 60 hours per week. Extended hours care is also provided by childminders, with parents often needing before school care, often 7.30am until 9am as well as afterschool care from 3pm until 6 or 7pm. Some of the reasons that parents give for using childminders over the option of formal childcare settings is the availability of extended and flexible hours, as well as services such as school drop offs and pick ups. In addition, childminders are constructed somewhere between 'family/home care' and formal childcare settings, in part because of the continuity of care and also that the care is located in the worker's home.

Both the number of hours spent in formal childcare and the age that children enter care are structured by a series of interlocking social, moral, economic and emotional considerations of parents (Duncan et al. 2004). Marie, who works four days a week and whose partner is the primary carer, explains that childcare decisions can also be subject to modification with subsequent children.

[The 7month old] does not go to nursery. He is at home with us. We think he will probably start in the autumn, approaching one year old. [First child] didn't go until she was 14months. And [second child] more like 12 months. It is definitely getting less. We are trying to, sort of, work out how we feel about that. With the second or third child you definitely feel a little less precious (Marie, 32 – three children aged 4 years, 2 years and 7 months).

Currently the length of statutory maternity pay, government funded childcare schemes, compulsory school entry and parent's belief in what is best for their children all form part of the matrix of when children enter formal care. Laura, who like Marie, is the sole earner for her family and whose husband is the primary carer for her two children is considering home-schooling her children to enable her to continue to work freelance in a job that requires significant travel. In part her reluctance to send her children to school is also informed from her style of parenting, which she describes as "I'm probably in the attachment parenting group" (Laura, 39 – two children aged 3 and 2 years). Laura's narration of her version of attachment parenting is rendered intelligible for her by her decision to co-sleep with her children, to breastfeed her eldest daughter until she was three years of age and by changes to her life after giving birth such as "I didn't go out at all, I didn't leave them in the evening for the first two years".

I am really looking into not schooling them at all, until 7 or 8, cause I mean, it is not necessary. Well, [school] is very, very useful for childcare and the majority of people in the world need childcare because they are going out to work and both people are working. We are not in the position. We don't need the childcare (Laura, 39 – two children aged 3 and 2 years).

Both Laura and Working Mum (from very different cultures of motherhood) articulate the norm of parenting as now being now constructed around working parents and, increasingly, with both parents working. Echoed in the Working Mum column, are the experiences of children who start full-time care at around 10 months old (statutory maternity pay currently ends after nine months). Measuring hours spent at home as compared to in formal care, these children spend considerably more time being cared for, educated and disciplined in institutional settings rather than by their families.

The concerns raised about the effects of children being in extended hours care can be thought of as a reoccurring concern, appearing often in mainstream media discourse about what is 'best for children' and often couched in the language of what's best for a child's development (Bunting 2007, Gentleman 2010, O'Keeffe 2015). It is a concern that features regularly in *Nursery World*, one that is directly addressed by lobby groups such as Mothers at Home

Matter,<sup>24</sup> and it is also an everyday conversation that circulates between mothers. The concern focuses on the effects of spending long hours in childcare and at what age children should enter formal childcare. Each side of the 'debate' produces scientific studies to support their respective arguments. These concerns are connected to previously dominant ideas regarding who should care for children and, also, where such care should take place; discourses that overwhelmingly promoted the mother and the family / home as the idealised providers of, and locations for, care.

Framing this in another way, would be to posit that previous attempts to meet the needs of working mothers, especially the needs of mothers who work full-time, were structured and limited by a construction of motherhood that was informed by the psychological theories of attachment as popularised by Dr John Bowlby (1965). Much of the concern in the post-war period was about ensuring a continuous mother-child relationship; one that was both promoted and also, literally, interpreted by post-war mothers to mean an intensive and consuming mode of mothering. However, despite the re-emergence of the concern in different contexts, the 'debate' has, in many respects, moved on, especially considering that 70 percent of mothers with young children are employed in waged work (ONS 2013b). To a large extent much of the post-war concern about maternal deprivation has dissipated or, perhaps, more accurately, the focus of concern has shifted, away from the psychological and emotional effects of formalised childcare towards providing working parents with more choices to achieve a satisfactory work/life balance (Lewis 2008) and with regards to accessing affordable, quality childcare.

What emerges from some analyses of how families organise and manage childcare and housework is "the robustness and longevity of traditional gender roles" (Vincent and Ball 2006:3). Asher expresses a similar sentiment when she considers "why progress towards sexual equality on the home front

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<sup>24</sup> "Our work is about love, parenting, family time and connections. We focus on the sort of 'care' that is given and received within families and particularly (but not exclusively) the special love and care given by mothers, often against the odds. When mothers, fathers, grandparents and other family members are able to support each other unconditionally, it's the very best start we can hope to give our children" ([www.motherathomematter.co.uk](http://www.motherathomematter.co.uk) - last accessed 1 Feb, 2016).

so far has moved with such glacial slowness” (2011:8). This sense of an unchanging gender contract with regard to motherhood and the domestic sphere stands in sharp contrast to the significant changes that have occurred in the last 40 years in how gender is experienced, constructed and disciplined. In some of the analysis a slippage occurs where gender begins to appear as a trans-historical formation. The interrelation between transformation and continuity is a difficult one to grasp. For example, Fiona Millar in *The Secret World of the Working Mother* outlines considerable and near constant change over the twentieth century, yet ends up writing “nothing changes then” (2009:19). There is an interesting distance between, on the one hand, the feeling that nothing has changed and, on the other hand, considerable experiences and evidence to the contrary. A more careful investigation is required— one that seeks to identify the instances of continuation and asks how they are maintained, instead of assuming that they are constant or stable. The question of how gender roles are maintained at their intersection with the relations of class and race is a question of how power is exercised and how subjects negotiate and confront the structural limitations and possibilities of both reproduction and waged work.

## **5.5 What’s Luck Got To Do With It: Choice and Planning**

To investigate to what, if any, extent gender subordination has intensified and/or been fundamentally altered through the extension and deepening of the rationality of neoliberalism it is necessary to further examine some of the discursive elements that arrange and organise the subjectivity of motherhood. In many of the interviews the notion of choice emerged as one the central devices that mothers used to make sense of their lives. For some, like Laura, the concept of choice was attached to meanings of freedom whereas for others, such as Julie or Hannah, the choice to have a child was structured by multiple miscarriages and several failed IVF attempts. In this section, I analyse the concept of choice and explore some of the ways that choice is put to work within the apparatus of motherhood. Furthermore, I examine how choice is mobilised within narratives of planning and how the concept of luck, often expressed as ‘being lucky’ or ‘being so fortunate’ disrupts and, in some instances, reorganises the discourse of choice.

I feel that I have a lot of freedom as a woman, I have been free to choose my husband, I have been free to choose my lifestyle, I have been free to have children and parent them in the way I want to, without too much interference (Laura, 39 – two children aged 3, and 2 years).

By returning to choice, this section builds on the arguments developed in Chapter Four, in which I posit that choice is central to mainstream feminist politics of reproduction and at the same time, it is via the discourse of choice that neoliberalism enters the domestic sphere and organises the practices and processes of reproduction and the subjectivity of motherhood. Considerable scholarship exists concerning motherhood and choice, primarily focused on reproductive choices promoted through assisted reproductive technology and the when, if and how of configuring having children (Bock 2000, Hadfield, Rudoe, and Sanderson-Mann 2007, Sevón 2005, Goodwin 2005). Goodwin makes the point that “since the introduction of reproductive technology as a ‘market choice’ for infertile couples in the 1980s, reproduction and family have taken on new medical, legal and social meaning and constructions” (2005:3). In this section, I discuss the operation of choice from a different perspective, producing an analysis of how choice operates within the apparatus of motherhood, as opposed to the choice of whether or not, or under which conditions, to become a mother.

I don’t want to go out and market myself because I don’t want to be pulled into a meeting at 5pm or a big job. So yes, the kids limit me. I choose that. Because I think that is best for them and for all of us really. But I am aware I am making a compromise (Grace, 41 – two children aged 11 and 7 years).

Choice is a dense and powerful discourse. Choice is a device through which subjects make sense of and individualise their decisions and actions. Grace’s statement “the kids limit me. I choose that,” articulates some of the boundaries of the labour of care, as well as being in possession of a certain degree of agency in selecting or making a decision. The availability and discourse of childcare as providing choice for mothers, operates to construct all other versions of combining work and care as also being a choice. For stay-at-home mother Chloe, the decision to leave her job in teaching, and care for her three young children is something that “I find myself having to explain”. The discourse of choice is powerful to the extent that it also renders non-

choices as choice. Another reading of “the kids limit me. I choose that,” is that it expresses the ways in which responsibility is produced as internal and, furthermore, how the structural limitations of the current organisation of work and care are experienced as an individualised choice.

Not only does the neoliberal rationality of choice produce an individualisation of social problems but it also re-naturalises risk, decision-making and behaviour and recodes such matters as internal to an individual’s social character. In this way choice operates to produce an affective co-responsibility, or “responsibilization” (Brown 2015, O’Malley 2009, Rose 1992), through which the subject is forced to become a self-provider and responsible for the choices they make. Pat O’Malley defines responsibilization as a term associated with neoliberal strategies referencing “the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another — usually a state agency — or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all” (2009:276).

Brown traces some of the differences between the act of being responsible and that of responsibilization as a move “from a substance-based adjective to a process-based transitive verb, shifting it from an individual capacity to a governance project” (2015:133). She posits that responsibilization “signals a regime in which the singular human capacity to be responsible is deployed to constitute and govern subjects and through which their conduct is organized and measured, remaking and reorienting them for a neoliberal order” (2015:133).

Nikolas Rose discusses the deployment of technologies of responsibilization as beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing throughout the nineteenth century as a series of strategies that “sought to medicalize the wealthy family, and to shape the domestic relations of the poor into the form of a private and moral family” (1999:74).

The home was to be transformed into a purified, cleansed, moralized, domestic space. It was to undertake the moral training of its children. It was to demonstrate and familiarize the dangerous passions of adults... imposing a duty of responsibility to each other, to home and to children, and a wish to better their own condition. The family, from then on, has a key role in the strategies of government through freedom. It links public objectives for the good health and good order of the social body with the desire of individuals for personal health and well-being (Rose 1999:74).

Exploring a different element of the discourse of choice, when Laura narrates that she has been “free to choose” she is expressing the right or ability to make, or the possibility of making such a selection. Being ‘free to choose’ has an historical, as well a contemporary, manifestation within feminist politics and provides the basis for the self-narration of women as individualised subjects who have the agency and freedom to make choices. In this way, liberal feminism is not overly prescriptive as to the specific choices that women make, instead women, in the sense of a generalised female subjectivity, need to be free to exercise their right to make choices and be in possession of two or more possibilities. The intersection of choice and motherhood also emerges in Millar’s (2009) discussion of how to combine motherhood and waged work:

There is no right and wrong way to combine work and motherhood...if you can get all the ingredients right, balancing home and work is not an impossible dream (Millar 2009:9)

The tension between the assertion that there is apparently no right or wrong choices with regards to motherhood and waged work at the same time as acknowledging that the ‘dream’ of balancing home and work is out of reach for many people captures the inconsistent messages that mothers face. Especially when we consider that to get “all the ingredients right” it is actually necessary to make particular choices, choices that are only available to particular women and are organised by structural relations as much as by individual choice. Jacques and Radtke argue that “neoliberal discourses of individualism and choice serve to support rather than undermine women’s traditional mandate” (2012:458). They continue “thus, for young women, ‘choice’ represents ‘constraint’ and not freedom” (Jacques and Radtke 2012:458).

Within mainstream liberal feminism, the discourse of choice equates women having more choices with the promotion of gender equality. One of the ongoing concerns with the presentation of gender equality that dominates mainstream feminist politics is that it fails to examine how gender is always-already constructed through relations of race, sexuality and class. The concept

of gender equality, focused narrowly on women being equal with men, ignores the profound inequalities that exist between women. Certainly, the failure of mainstream feminism to develop an intersectional analysis of race, class and gender is not a new problem (Mohanty 1988). However what is also clear, is that the discourse of choice as deployed within mainstream feminism operates to obscure rather than expose the mechanisms through which different women's uneven access to income, education, agency and freedom are produced and maintained. Moreover, there is a tendency to assert that having the same job status provides the basis for equality in domestic relationships.

The power balance shifts between two individuals working full-time with roughly equal status to a couple in which one partner works full-time and the other part-time, or not at all (Millar 2009:9).

I had a decent line of work that, though it didn't make me rich or powerful, allowed me to think of myself as an independent, capable woman (Asher 2011:1).

The labour of reproduction, in particular the unwaged work of raising and caring for children sits, uncomfortably within the conceptualisation of gender equality as being achieved by both men and women obtaining full-time employment status. From such a perspective, the unwaged labour of raising and caring for children quickly loses any of the positive characteristics of work (work as providing meaning, purpose or status) and is relegated to 'non-work'; coded as not only involving "tedious drudgery" but also structured by relations of dependence. Consider again the way in which Asher discusses returning to work as being ready to have "a place in the world again" (2011:6). Her sense that motherhood and the labour of reproduction exists outside of 'the world' expresses a set of values that equates waged employment as providing meaning, sociality and self-worth and devalues the domestic sphere and specifically the labour of reproduction.

The independence, sense of recognition and daily purpose that I'd been used to gave way to gruelling, unacknowledged servitude (Asher 2011:3).

In this instance, the affective division produces the drudgery of reproduction, the "gruelling unacknowledged servitude" as repetitive labour that mothers



have no choice but to do. Choice operates in such a way as to produce a normalisation of both the devaluation of the work and of the only other 'choice'; that of outsourcing and paying someone else to do the work. What is obscured is that the choice of accessing commodified reproductive services is a relation that is only made possible through considerable income inequality, alongside the gendered and racialised construction of certain women as more suited to certain kinds of work (Parrenas 2001, Agustin 2007).

Within a "postfeminist sensibility," (Gill and Scharff 2011) the neoliberal narrative of gender is one that draws a clear interrelation between choice (understood as providing freedom and the possibility for an independent life) and the politics of gender equality and equal employment opportunities. However, the belief in waged work as providing women with freedom and a life of meaning and purpose relies on the mobilisation of a particular type of employment, namely professional careers. It is the 'lovely' professional and well-paid jobs as opposed to the 'lousy' service jobs that are operative within the discourse of work as providing choices for women.

To the degree that low-paid repetitive service work can be thought of as providing women with independence, it does so through the provision of a wage and not through an experience of work as creating a "busy and purposeful life" (Asher 2011:3). At the same time, there is a concerning lack of acknowledgement of the dependent characteristics that full-time professional employment has with the ever-expanding low waged service industries. Framing this in another way would be to highlight that the pursuit and realisation of a full-time professional career is only made possible through the labour of a significantly larger female workforce employed in the devalued and highly exploitative service industries.

In so far as previous feminist analysis has highlighted the dependent and necessary role that the unwaged labour of the housewife had in relation to the reproduction of male labour-power (Mies 1998, Dalla Costa 1975, Federici 2012), it is also possible to draw attention to a similar relation of "denied dependency" (Plumwood 2003) that currently exists between the professional middle-class and the low-wage service industries. To be sure, this dynamic is hardly a new formation of class exploitation and dependency, however what needs to be highlighted is that it has more in common with the organisation

of class relations in the Victorian era than with post-war Britain. The point of difference is that these relations are today constructed as a matter of choice and not a matter of morality. Boris and Parrenas (2010) make the point that one of the features of contemporary global capitalism is the heightened commodification of intimacy, which they note has parallels with nineteenth-century Victorian Britain, the United States and throughout the British Empire. However, they note that contemporary global capitalism is distinguished by both the intensification of commodification and the ever-decreasing spaces for alternative ways of being.

One of the problems for mainstream feminist politics that promotes greater female employment as the best means to achieving equality is the fact that far more women work in 'lousy' service jobs than they do in 'lovely' professional jobs. The 2011 Census reveals that, overall, almost 6 in 10 (59 percent) women in employment worked in "low-skilled jobs" (ONS 2014a)<sup>25</sup>. It is interesting to note the language in the ONS report, namely employment that is still discussed and characterised as "low-skilled". It is worth making the point that care; service; secretarial and administrative jobs demand a complex and nuanced set of skills. It is work that continues, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, to be perceived as low skilled; a perception that works to ensure that it remains both low-status and low-paid. Breaking down the data on gender in the ONS report a little further highlights the intersection of relations of race and gender in the labour market, with 67 percent of Bangladeshi women and 66 percent of White and Black Caribbean women employed in "low skill jobs" (ONS 2014a). These statistics are stark, to the extent that I would argue that the attainment of equality for certain women and men, in their relationships, employment opportunities and how they organise and relate to parenthood, is in fact predicated on the exploitation and devaluation of the labour of other women, particularly migrants, women of colour and working-class women. In this way, the postfeminist sensibility that organises gender within neoliberalism as a series of choices is the repackaging of an old story of female subordination retold through

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<sup>25</sup> The ONS (2014a) lists low skilled jobs as including: administrative and secretarial occupations; caring leisure and other service occupations; sales and customers service occupations; process plant and machine operatives and elementary occupations

rewarding some women for making 'good' choices, to the determinant of those women who supposedly make 'bad' choices.

## **5.6 The Things That Everyone is Supposed to Want**

One of the consequences of the construction of reproduction as a series of choices is that it renders mothers (and also non-mothers) responsible for their decisions, circumstances and actions. The choice of having children (or not) is produced as a private decision, an individualised one (Jacques and Radtke 2012). Within neoliberal discourses of motherhood, not only is the decision to have children a private matter for which individual parents bear the responsibility but, in addition, there is also a compulsion to constantly calculate the costs and benefits of one's choices, as well as identify the risks associated with certain behaviours, options and desires. These processes comprise much of the day-to-day work of motherhood and form the discursive basis for the differentiation of parenting styles and cultures rendered intelligible through series of purported choices.

This process of subjectification, through which the neoliberal mother embodies the process of responsabilization can be further explored through the obligation to plan. In this section, I discuss the concept of choice via the role of planning and explore how certain aspects of women's lives go 'according to plan' and certain aspects don't. The necessity of planning, a practice that is always-already gendered, exceeds the need for women to have a plan about when or if to have children, in that it also organises other normative 'good choices' — such as choosing the right partner, buying a house and also having a 'good' job. Narrating the moment when she rejected the "rat race" and made the decision to go travelling for an extended number of years, Nicole discusses the normative future plan that young women are supposed want. During the interview she joked that, in the end, despite leaving the UK for a number of years and returning at 29 with no job or partner, within a short space of time she found herself married and with two kids (twins) — all before she turned 30.

When I was little, little, like a young teenager, I thought by 30 I would have two kids and a husband, a house and a full time job, you know, the things

that everyone is supposed to want (Nicole, 32 - two children, twins aged 2 years).

Planning operates as both a method of doing or achieving something (having a plan) and also as a declaration of an intention or decision about what one is going to do (making plans). A plan is something that subjects are both in possession of and a successful plan is produced through doing. In this sense, planning produces a different ideal, one that is not the same as a future self constructed through an orientation of fantasy or myths.

Number three [child] came along without him fitting exactly into the plan. If he did fit exactly into the plan, he should be arriving— I think we were planning on having him, or her when my daughter started primary school. But he will be one-and-half by then! (Chloe, 36 - three children aged 4, 3, and 1 year old)

The fantasy of having the 'dream home' or 'perfect job' operates differently than making a plan to buy a house, planning to return to education so as to apply for a new employment position or planning the age difference between children. A person can have 'big plans' for the future but the embodiment of planning operates to create a different future self than the one produced via fantasy. The neoliberal compulsion to plan operates in such a way as to enable each plan to be individualised (though this doesn't mean that they are unique) and hence produces a sense of following your own bespoke script:

The kids are two and three. We had them very close. Partly because I am self-employed and I'm the only earner, so, it made sense... It made sense for me to parent two at once. Economically it made sense (Laura, 39 - two children aged 3 and 2 years).

To be able to survive financially, especially in single earner families like Laura's, it is necessary to have a plan of when and how to have children. In many ways, the compulsion for neoliberal subjects to plan has taken the place of fantasies and idealised role models. It is not just that planning is a way of individuals and families adapting to the reconfiguration of social reproduction, it also gestures towards the perception of a lack or scarcity of resources. It is also a way of setting families up against each other and training children to be good planner subjects.

## 5.7 Two Faces of Luck

One of the mechanisms that the mothers who were interviewed deployed to make sense of the gaps and contradictions that structured their 'choices' was the concept of luck. In many of the interviews the notion of luck, of 'feeling lucky', provided a counterpoint to maternal choice. Luck reorganises choice in that 'being lucky' suggests that one's success or failure is brought about by chance rather than through one's own actions.

I'm lucky that my partner earns enough, that we can [have me at home]" (Cath, 38 - three children, 5 years, 4 years, and 15 months).

"I feel quite lucky that I am able to stay home with the kids" (Jenny, 39 - two children aged 3 years, and 8 months).

Within the discourse of luck, it is chance and not choice that determines the situation. It is interesting to note that the way luck emerges in how women discuss their household earnings, care arrangements and housing situations highlights and not only the said but also the unsaid. In many instances, 'being lucky' expressed less matters of chance and more the structural and systemic ways that class and race relations remain central to how motherhood is experienced.

"I have a husband, I am married, and he earns good money, about £49,000... which takes him into the higher earning tax bracket and we are really aware how lucky we are in lots and lots of ways" (Isabelle, 35 - two children aged 5 and 2 years).

There is a clear tension between luck (as chance) and choice. In so far as we have no control over the class relations that we are born into, the maintenance and continuation of an economic system that produces class subjects is not by chance. Social relations of class like gender, sexuality and race require the active maintenance of a series of structural and embodied practices and processes of separation and differentiation. Through the notion of luck, the uneven distribution of "lovely and lousy jobs" (Goos and Manning 2003b); who gets to be a good mother; who gets to live in a nice house in a good neighbourhood; these things are able to be reframed as chance. In that the practices and processes through which race, gender and class relations structure the uneven distribution of incomes, housing and employment are erased. It is also interesting to note the gendered construction of 'being lucky'.

One of the silences in the discourse of luck expressed in the interviews is the more masculine articulation of one's social position as derived from hard work, bravery or making difficult decisions.

In addition, there is a difference between describing one's life as determined by chance and expressing a sense of gratitude, of "feeling lucky" to have had access to a certain experience of motherhood.

I feel really lucky to be honest. I was just saying it last night actually— I was looking at a nursery for September for them, maybe, because I am not sure what I am doing [with work], then I got there and I was like, oh God! I have been so lucky to have been at home with them for so long (Nicole, 32 - two children, twins aged 2 years).

I'm lucky that I have had all this time with [child]. With juggling it, you just get the worst of both worlds. You feel like you are doing everything badly. At least when I do the motherhood badly, it is not that bad. I wouldn't have changed it for the world (Sally, 38 - one child aged 8 years).

If motherhood is a contingent outcome of capitalist development, as well as the direct result of government intervention, it is usefully understood as a subjectivity that has not only changed but is constantly being contested. The sense of gratitude of being able to spend time with one's own children signals a shift in how the reproductive labour of motherhood is organised. It speaks directly to the construction of "family time" as scarce and that the time to be a mother is limited (Saatchi & Saatchi 2015). This subtle, yet noticeable shift, in the subjectivity of motherhood becomes clearer when we consider the notion of 'being lucky to be a mother' in light of the previous feminist "literature of complaint" (Rowbotham 1989a) that critiqued, not only the institution of the family, but also post-war motherhood. The idea of feeling lucky to be a middle-class mother at home with the kids seems pretty unimaginable within the context of the 1960s and 1970s in Britain.

The feminist discourses of choice and equality, as well as the neoliberal notions of rational choice, have reconfigured the subjectivity of motherhood. One possible way of reading this shift in the discourse of motherhood from 'feeling discontented' to 'feeling lucky' is that it signals a change in how the devaluation of the labour of reproductive functions. The affective and relational aspects of reproduction, specifically the notion of spending time

with children, has undergone a process of being revalued and romanticised. This revaluation works to reinforce the separations and the binary of the good aspects (affective, emotional care) from that of the drudgery of motherhood. The drudgery of motherhood remains the physical, demanding, repetitive aspect of domestic work.

Here it is necessary to note that the maintenance of such separations is structured by the materiality of reproduction in so far as “unlike other forms of production, the production of human beings is, to a great extent, irreducible to mechanization, requiring a high degree of human interaction and the satisfaction of complex needs in which physical and affective elements are inextricably combined (Federici, 2012:107). However, the proliferation of ‘market solutions’ has enabled many families — albeit in uneven ways — to negotiate and organise this separation via commodified services such as hiring cleaners, nannies, using laundry services or buying pre-packaged meals. In other words “housework and care work have been redistributed on the shoulders of different subjects through its commercialisation and globalisation” (Federici, 2012:107). In this sense, ‘being lucky’ is being in possession of enough wealth — wealth that according to the neoliberal discourse of choice, is generated through having the right plan, taking risks and making the right choices — to be able to choose just the good bits of motherhood and contract out the aspects that either you don’t have the time to do or don’t want to do.

Alternatively, another way of analysing the shift in the affective experiences of middle-class ‘full-time’ motherhood from the 1970s to the present, is that it expresses the contradictory ways that neoliberal governmentality promotes the adult-worker model and dual income households, alongside the promotion of ‘traditional’ family values and the benefits of family care. The tensions between these two competing discourses of women as workers and women as mothers are even more stark when we consider that “not only has state investment in the workforce drastically reduced, but reproductive activities have been reorganized as value-producing services that workers must purchase and pay for” (Federici, 2012:100). While there is a temptation to think of the affirmation of ‘feeling lucky to be a full-time mother’ as anti-feminist, conservative or as belonging to the past, it is also possible to read the

narration of luck in a different way. 'Feeling lucky' doesn't necessarily speak to a conception of full-time motherhood as women's destiny or as a permanent role, nor is it necessarily critical or hostile towards other configurations of motherhood such as being a working mother. Instead, 'feeling lucky' suggests having access to something unique or uncommon. Furthermore, it suggests that the normative experience of motherhood under neoliberalism is one in which most women 'juggle' employment and responsibility for children. It speaks to an alternative vision of motherhood, one that differs from women who are constantly striving and often failing to achieve a desirable work/life balance.

The configuration of motherhood as a lived experience and as a subjectivity that is organised and arranged by various discourses, has undergone considerable transformation and modification with the rise of neoliberalism. Feminism as a space of counter-discourse and critique of normative gender roles has also undergone considerable transformations, especially in the ways that the politics of reproduction are expressed and fought over. Paraphrasing Denise Riley, mainstream feminist discourse has shifted from a language and politics of reproductive rights to one centred on reproductive choice — a shift that has occurred in conjunction with the expansion and dominance of neoliberal discourses of human behaviour as predicated on rational choice. The contemporary construction of motherhood as a matter of personal choice differs from post-war discourses that configured motherhood as a woman's destiny and natural role. This shift is reflected in changes to feminist politics and practices that previously addressed the social democratic welfare state and called for reproductive rights such as access to abortion and 24-hour nurseries. Federici writes: "We wanted to gain control over our bodies and our sexuality, put an end to the slavery of the nuclear family and to our dependence on men" (2012:55). Previous feminist discourses of reproduction and domestic work differ from contemporary feminist politics that place an emphasis on creating more choices for women. It is also possible to argue that, as a result of motherhood being constructed more and more as something that is chosen, the spaces of resistance and opposition towards motherhood have been limited and, in many ways, individuated.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Back to the Future: The Women's Liberation Movement and the Demand for 24-hour Nurseries

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#### 6.1 Echoes

Having gathered momentum throughout the late 1960s, in the early 1970s the British Women's Liberation Movement emerged and arrived on the political stage. In *The Past is Before Us*, feminist historian Shelia Rowbotham writes that the women's movement erupted "in a literature of complaint which focused on the experiences of the family — both in the sense of life in the household and with kin" (1989a:3). It was not that "every woman suddenly became unhappy, but that significant numbers of women felt entitled to a destiny which was not simply domestic" (Rowbotham 1989a:7). It is at this eruption, at this literature of complaint that the next part of the history of 24-hour childcare begins.

In this chapter, 24-hour nurseries are not analysed as childcare services as they were in Chapter Four. Rather, 24-hour childcare is situated as an echo of a political demand made four decades ago. In this echo we can locate some of the voices of the women involved in Women's Liberation Movement, as well as the long discussions about how childcare was central to the struggle for women's economic and social autonomy. Through an investigation of the echo, understood as both a repetition in structure and of content, the chapter asks what of the original voices still linger and, equally, what has been lost. The investigation of the echo of 24-hour childcare is drawn from an analysis of archival materials, memoirs and oral histories of women's struggles in the 1970s.

The chapter traces multiple aspects of the echo of the demand for 24-hour nurseries. In particular, I focus on two parallel developments; firstly the feminist critique of the domestic destiny of women and secondly, working

women's struggles for equal pay and employment opportunities. Through exploring the different desires and needs for childcare that existed in the 1970s a fault line of class emergences, one that highlights the diverse contexts and histories that produced the demand. The chapter considers the context in which the demand was raised, who drafted it and how it became central to the demands of the women's movement. In unravelling and addressing these questions what becomes visible is that which has been lost in the passage from its articulation — when the demand was for free, state provision of 24-hour childcare — to now. The tensions and differences in the history of the demand for 24-hour childcare force the question of which women wanted and needed childcare and of women's different aspirations. The chapter also considers the demand for childcare at the intersection of the constructions of race and migration. As such the focus shifts from the predominately white Women's Liberation Movement and brings another set of voices into the frame, specifically those of the Black Women's Movement.

Rowbotham (1989a) outlines two moments of rupture that provided the impetus for the Women's Liberation Movement. The first moment was the discontent, often expressed as dissatisfaction with the "image of contented motherhood as an embodiment of post-war female selfhood" (Hughes 2011:26) of young, educated, middle-class women who had been influenced by student politics and the New Left. Discontented and dissatisfied, by the early 1970s these young women had started to articulate their desire for social transformation and radical change through concepts of liberation and an ever-growing insistence of the centrality of women's liberation to revolutionary politics. Many were young mothers and many were some of the first generation of women who benefited from the expansion of university education, women who, as Hughes (2012) argues, experienced profound dislocation between middle-class maternal identity and the search for independent intellectual and political identities beyond domestic life.

The first national Women's Liberation conference was held at Ruskin College, Oxford in February 1970. The Women's Weekend, as it was called, was initially intended to be a women's history conference, but when almost 600 women expressed a desire to attend, it was adapted to address women's issues more broadly and became the first of many national conferences of the

Women's Liberation Movement<sup>26</sup> (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive). This first national gathering was "an opportunity for women concerned about women's oppression in this society to come together to discuss their common situation" (Ruskin Conference document 1970). At the first Ruskin gathering four demands were discussed. These demands were agreed upon at the subsequent national conference held in Skegness in 1971. The demands were: equal pay; equal educational and job opportunities; free contraception and abortion on demand; free 24-hour nurseries (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive)<sup>27</sup>.

The second moment of rupture that provided the momentum for the Women's Liberation Movement came from working-class women's — who were mostly active in trade unions — and their dissatisfaction and impatience with persistent and widespread gender-based inequality and discrimination in the workplace. Throughout the late 1960s, these grievances and demands were increasingly expressed as the need for equal rights; specifically equal pay and employment opportunities. The Dagenham Ford factory strike in 1968, in which women machinists went on strike over unequal grading and pay, is widely remembered as one of the key events in the struggle for equal pay in Britain (Rowbotham 1989a). The struggle for equality, expressed overwhelmingly through a discourse of equality in the workplace, gathered momentum throughout the 1960s and 1970s and exposed a number of tensions within the women's movement, specifically in relation to questions of class. At the same time, the successful campaign for equal pay legislation exposed the distance between legislative change and the material conditions of women's lives.

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<sup>26</sup> Between 1970 and 1978 there were eight national WLM conferences held across Britain. At the first gathering at Ruskin there was a free crèche, organised and staffed by men. One of the organisers, Sally Alexander, recalls that she first met Stuart Hall when he was working at the crèche at the Ruskin conference (Memorial, Stuart Hall 2014). The conference organisers released a press statement banning the media from entering the crèche (Ruskin Conference document 1970). However the conference organisers were also aware of the media interest in the crèche, presumably because in 1970 childcare organised by men was newsworthy and the conference organisers held a press conference in the crèche on the Sunday afternoon.

<sup>27</sup> In later years three further demands were added: legal and financial independence for all women; the right to a self-defined sexuality; an end to discrimination against lesbians (Edinburgh, 1974); freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion regardless of marital status; and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women (Birmingham, 1978). At the 1978 Birmingham conference, amid some controversy, "the right to a self-defined sexuality was split off and added as a preface to all seven demands" (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive).

These two parallel moments — of freedom from the domestic for some and equality in employment for others — produced, and equally were produced by, the emergence of the women's movement in Britain and can be understood to constitute an expression of different aspirations. Viewed through the echo of the demand for extended and flexible childcare (24-hour childcare) that was raised by both groups of women, what becomes clear is that for many middle-class women, who were overwhelmingly young, white and educated, their demand for 24-hour childcare emerged from an aspiration for an independent life. An aspiration for a life that was both financially and legally independent from men and one in which women were free to make something of themselves. In contrast, for many working-class women active in working-class communities and trade unions, the demand for better and more childcare expressed a different aspiration, one in which the necessity for waged work was assumed and the difficulties in combining care and waged work were understood to be central to claims of gender equality. The centrality of childcare to the politics of equality exposes the gendered difference that care makes to women and men's employment opportunities and income levels. In making visible the differences between (some) women and (some) men, the aspiration for equality expressed by working women in the 1970s was also about getting what was owed, about being treated fairly at work and was framed as a struggle not so much against men but against the boss and, by extension, the state.

## **6.2 The Personal is Political**

Some of the powerful formative experiences and influences within the early years of the movement were gained from small consciousness-raising groups. These consciousness-raising groups, often meeting in activists' front living rooms "underlined the political and psychological importance socialist feminist's attached to process and affect when it came to redefining the concept of politics" (Hughes 2012:22). Situated within a critique of the dominant divisions between the 'internal' and 'external' ways of being that existed on the Left (Rowbotham 1983), the Women's Liberation Movement "called upon women to understand their relationship to the group and the movement in psychological terms of internal attachment and change"

(Hughes 2012:22). These collective discussions, at times producing emotional discomfort and exposing vulnerabilities, enabled women to understand and articulate their personal and private relationships not just as the experiences of individuals, but also as possessing a social dimension.

Catherine Hall discusses the dynamics and effect of discussing private and personal experiences in a Birmingham-based consciousness-raising group as “the recognition that the things we felt were a social phenomena was incredibly liberating” (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive). She points to the powerful effect of a collective naming of the problem and of “being able to identify it as something called maternity and domesticity and being a housewife”. She recalls that:

We were all middle-class, we’d all been brought up to think that, you know, our job was to look after our husbands and children in whatever, many varied versions of that but nevertheless [it was] a powerful imperative about what it meant to be a woman (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive).

Although the precise date is difficult to identify, the first issue of *Shrew*<sup>28</sup> confirms that by autumn 1969 the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group were holding regular Tuesday night meetings at Karen Slaney's house at 31 Dartmouth Park Hill in north London. Inspired by her participation in the American Women's Liberation Movement, as well as the politics of childcare and childrearing circulating in German social movements, in June 1969, one of the founding members of the Tufnell Park group, Sheli Wortis published an account of attempts to set up ‘A People's Crèche’ in northwest London (Hughes 2011). The intention was to provide a place “for parents to do collective political work near their children, but not always administering to them” [and they] “proposed setting up crèches at future conferences, even developing them to enable children to sleep at the crèche on some evenings to allow their parents to go off to meeting together” (Wortis, cited in Hughes

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<sup>28</sup> The Women's Liberation Workshop published *Shrew* from 1969 - 1974, with additional issues appearing sporadically after 1976. ‘Shrew was put together by existing groups within the London Women's Liberation Workshop, usually by a local group who had been meeting together for some time’ (Shrew, Autumn 1976).

2011:216). Reflecting on her decision to establish the Tufnell Park Women's Liberation group, Wortis explains:

I didn't feel there was a place for women who had children. My entrance into the women's movement was really as a young mother ... that is what I wanted to form: a group around the politics of being a woman who wanted to be active either professionally or in work or in society, who also had children in a society in which women as mothers were not really valued (Wortis, cited in Hughes 2011:233).

A second Women's Liberation group started in south London at around the same time as Wortis and Slaney were establishing the Tufnell Park group in 1969. The south London group was comprised of women who met through the Peckham One O'clock Club<sup>29</sup>. Theoretical questions of childcare as well as the practical concerns of women with care responsibilities were present in the formation of both the Tufnell Park and Peckham Rye Women's Liberation groups. By September 1969, Women's Liberation groups were meeting in Tufnell Park, Peckham Rye, Notting Hill, Belsize Lane and Islington (Leaflet: Women's Liberation Workshop 1971a). Beyond the immediate question of childcare, questions of the family as both an institution and ideology and of women's economic, political and cultural role as both mothers and housewives, continued to dominate the discussion, campaigns and activity of the women's movement throughout the 1970s.

In the first edition of *Red Rag* (1973), a socialist feminist magazine produced by participants of and for the Women's Liberation Movement, Florence Keyworth writes that the four original demands were

the things women must have if they are to take hold of their own lives and develop as independent human beings instead of being prisoners of the family and half-pay wages slaves - pushed into unskilled jobs and forced to stay in them (1973:3).

While the demand for free 24-hours nurseries is the focus this chapter, the other three original demands also emerge as relevant in thinking through the

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<sup>29</sup> One O'clock Clubs continue to meet across Britain, often operating in parks, community centres and churches. They are usually organised as childcare services that are run by parent, meeting at 1pm to socialise and collectively look after children not yet in school.

histories and counter-narratives of the struggle for women's economic and social autonomy; it is not possible to separate childcare from questions of equality in the workplace, equal pay or access to abortion and contraception. Moreover, to understand how 24-hour childcare became one of the original demands of women's movement it is necessary to consider the social and political context in which the demands were made and whom it was that was making these demands.

One of the discussion papers, *Child-Rearing and Women's Liberation* (1970) presented by Wortis at the first Ruskin national gathering provides a useful insight into the emerging feminist critique of theories of maternal care and the notion that "[w]omen are conditioned to expect that their major responsibility to society and to themselves is as wives and mothers" (Wortis 1970). Directly connected to the dominance of influential psychological theories about intensive mothering and the dangers of mother-child separation, the discussion paper highlights that "it is popularly assumed that the individual home provides the best environment for raising healthy children" and furthermore that "the domestication and subordination of women is perpetuated by modern psychology" (Wortis 1970). The paper argues that no matter how egalitarian society becomes with respect to educational and job opportunities, women's ability to participate in society "depends on a change in child-rearing practices and in family responsibility" (Wortis 1970).

Catherine Hall's assessment of the four demands was that "obviously there were the four demands which then gave kind of shape to what we thought we were doing. But I think that childcare was always at the top of the list because that's where we were" (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive). She continues "we weren't at that point working women in full employment. We'd had educational opportunities. So the thing that hit home most with us was about the importance of childcare provision" (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive). The emerging dissatisfaction with the dominant discourse of motherhood that began within the Women's Liberation movement took issue with, not only with the perceived confinement of women to the role of mothers, but also started to express and experiment with the provision of childcare in collective and non-domestic settings.

Rowbotham (1989a) explains that the idea of the demand for 24-hour nurseries was initially gained from the experiences of attempts, admittedly unsuccessful attempts, to get campaigns for more nursery provision started in the early 1970s. She writes the campaign for more nurseries “was a non-starter. But we did learn, green as we were, that there was more to it than nursery school” (Rowbotham 1989a:127) (1989:127). It was through speaking to mothers that feminist activists noticed a common complaint of women being unable to go out in the evening and that there was no flexibility in the childcare that was offered. Denise Riley recalls a similar motivation behind the demand, “the wish for some unchallengeable flexibility for mothers” (Riley 1983a:133).

In this instance, the desire for childcare appears not so much as providing time to work but in recognition that mothers, within the context of the “post-war glorification of motherhood” (Hughes 2012:26), did not need time to care or time to work but, instead, some time for themselves. By tracing the different elements of the echo of the demand for 24-hour childcare, the expression of some women’s aspiration for independence also exposes resistant desires that operate alongside and against the different expressions of aspiration. Here the desire for time alone, to dwell as a mother in a world momentarily without children, is connected to the aspiration of independence but it also resists the drive to make something of your life, so often expressed in the language of professional careers.

As much as the demand for 24-hour nurseries encapsulated desires for flexibility, there is also something quietly dystopian and perhaps deliberately disturbing in its articulation. One can assume that in 1971 this affect was even more pronounced as the demand powerfully disrupted the economic and social role of women as full-time mothers and housewives that prevailed in the post-war period. Thinking through this quietly dystopian articulation, it is useful to note the persistent criticism, indeed one that continues to be made of contemporary feminism, which was that “the Women’s Liberation Movement ignored the needs of mothers” (Segal 2008:84). This accusation comes from a variety of sources, which Segal notes, “comes as much from other women, including feminists, as from men” (Segal 2008:84).



Riley also draws attention to the specific charge that “feminism is indifferent to the problem of mothers and children” (1983a:133). According to Riley (1983a), the strong anxieties concerning childcare that were present in the women’s movement were borne from the unease of running the risk of confirming feminism with anti-child or anti-mother sentiment. Riley posits that this risk was connected to feminists’ refusal to believe in maternal destiny and the “naturalness and inevitability of who does what in the kitchen” (1983a:132). Rowbotham writes that “it is not in fact true that in the early days of the women’s liberation movement in Britain there was an outright rejection of motherhood” (Rowbotham 1989a:97). In contrast, she recalls during “many early discussions women complaining about the practical problem of childcare but expressing happiness in being mothers [and that] we wanted new relationships and conditions in which we could have children and lead fuller lives” (Rowbotham 1989a:98).

The juxtaposition between women’s social and political autonomy with that of motherhood exposes a number of tensions, particularly with the desire for women’s independence. Not only do women usually have the responsibility for caring for children, but there is also the dependency that children have on those who care for them. Reallocating and sharing care responsibilities between parents, as well as with extended kinship and social networks can reconfigure the work of care, however it does not change the relations of dependency that care involves. It is useful in this instance to note the repetition and persistence of the accusation of feminism’s betrayal of mothers and, equally, the strong rebuttal of such claim, articulated here by three women (Riley, Segal and Rowbotham), all of whom were active in the movement and all three who were mothers during the 1970s. Segal argues that, in her experience, some of the key instigators of the women’s movement were already mothers and that:

we fought tirelessly and in the end extremely successfully for changes in maternity care,...placed the subject of nurseries, shared parenting, ‘working’ time, children’s health requirements, play space, schooling, mothers housing needs...on political agendas (Segal 2008:86).

Riley questions why there has been such an enduring charge that “feminism has nothing to say to or about women with children” (1983a:133). She points

to the possible impression of 'child-dumping' expressed in the original demand of 24-hour nurseries. Rowbotham similarly stresses that while the demand was developed out of the need for flexible hours in childcare, it did also conjure up "a horrific Brave New World of baby farms and impersonal, heartless child-rearing" (Rowbotham 1989a:132). A leaflet from the Women's Liberation Workshop attempted to clarify the intention of the demand,

we don't think of 24-hour centres as anonymous dumping grounds for our children nor for any children; nor do we mean that a child would be left for 24-hours; but that provision has to be made for emergencies and night workers (Leaflet: Women's Liberation Workshop 1971b).

Despite repeated clarifications and attempts to provide evidence to the contrary, the charge of feminism's betrayal and disinterest in motherhood prevails. In part, the lasting impression of feminism being against motherhood is, and was, borne from a profound suspicion of feminist attempts to unravel the mythologies of motherhood. The disjuncture perhaps lies in the fact that women in the early days of the movement were, indeed, critical and loudly dissatisfied with dominant constructions of motherhood but, for them, this did not mean that they were attacking women with children; it was motherhood not mothers that was the problem.

The disjuncture can also be read as a process of conflict, one highlights the tensions and limits present in the aspiration of women's independence. Here the aspiration of independence, as something to be achieved as much for women with children as those without, is caught in tension with the resistant desire for autonomy and an ability to exceed the constraints of the role of motherhood. The demand for 24-hour nurseries, as clunky and impersonal as it was, managed to capture and, in many respects, disrupt one of the central contradictions of gender subjectivities under capitalism. The disquiet the demand produced, from misunderstandings to downright rejection, is testament to the affective dynamics of the demand, in that it takes hold of biological reproduction and explicitly attempts to shift the work of childcare from the realm of the private to one in which the care and responsibility for children are socialised.

### **6.3 Grey Documents and Playgroups: Encounter# 5**

During the last months of 2013, I often attended the weekly playgroup at the Mt Nebo Community Hall on Wednesday at 10am. After the birth of our second child, my partner, the two kids and myself packed up and flew the 28-hours from London to Brisbane, Australia and spent three months living with my mother and stepfather in their mountain home.

The weekly playgroup is held in the Blue Room, an extension to the local community hall, that my mother fundraised for and helped build for the after-school care program she established in the 1990s. At the time she was a working mother and, despite Mt Nebo being a relatively progressive community with a strong hippy counter-culture, there was no after-school program. With a minimum commute of over an hour, the lack of childcare made working, even part-time, pretty much impossible. She had also established an after-school program at my inner-city Brisbane primary school in the 1980s. At the time she had been a single mother and was working full-time, so access to extended care had been crucial.

The Mt Nebo playgroup has been held at the hall on Wednesdays at 10am for as long as I can remember. My stepfather used to take my sister and brother there every week. On my second visit in 2013, accompanied by my then four-year old daughter and six-month-old baby, a woman named Dee attended. Dee was an older woman who I remembered from my teenage years of living on the mountain. As a long-term resident of the community she knew most of the other parents at the playgroup, though she did not attend with any children herself. Conversation floated around, we discussed my temporary return home and another mother's research work, and eventually Dee asked me "what are you doing your PhD on?"

My response – "Umm, well, it's about the home, the work that women and men do in the home, um, about commodification and how neoliberalism has shaped domestic labour... oh, and about feminism and the women's liberation movement", was characteristic of the self-consciousness and awkward manner typical of doctoral students.

To which Dee's reply, delivered in her hybrid American-Australian accent completely surprised me: "Oh, that's so funny! You might be interested in this thing from the 1970's called 'Wages for Housework'". She was definitely the first person to make such a connection off the back of my rather fumbled and clunky explanation of my research.

I replied with a mixture of relief and amusement, "I know the campaign well. It is, in fact, central to my work and, actually, well, you know, I have had my fair share of run-in's with Selma James". To which Dee responded, also laughing "Well she always was a tough old thing and, you know, I grew up on the same street as her in Brooklyn".

At which point my response was simply, "REALLY?" I was completely disorientated. I was on the other side of the world, sitting in a circle, in the bush with a group of parents who I hardly knew, talking to a woman who I had known from my childhood, who somehow, not only understood my PhD, but also had grown up on the same street as Selma James.

Dee continued "Yeah, and I have all these old papers at my house from when I lived in London in the 70's, from the Wages for Housework campaign, other old stuff as well".

I immediately asked "Can I come around and have a look at them?" Dee responded warmly, "Of course you can".

The next day I walked over to Dee's house and she, indeed, had a huge personal archive of papers, from all the Women's Liberation conferences in Britain, from the Power of Women Collective that Selma James set up and general leaflets and campaign materials from the London Nursery Campaign, Wages for Housework and other childcare collectives and campaigns. We spent hours talking about the years she spent in England, while I sat and scanned copies of old documents, leaflets and copies of feminist magazines.

## 6.4 Differing Conceptions of Childcare

From the outset there was considerable disagreement about how to approach and tackle the question of childcare, both within the Women's Liberation Movement and in trade union campaigns that addressed discrimination against women in employment and pay conditions. In the 1971 edition of *Enough*, the Bristol Women's Liberation Journal, Angela Rodaway raised a direct criticism of the demand for 24-hour nurseries, asking

Did we really imagine under-fives being delivered at ten [in the evening] and collected at six when women came off shifts? Did we want 24-schools? (Rodaway cited in Rowbotham 1989a:132)

Rodaway's argument was that adequately addressing the question of childcare required a series of changes in the organisation of life and work — rather than an over-simplified demand. Reflecting on attempts to initiate a national campaign around the demand for 24-hour nurseries in an article for *Red Rag*, Valerie Charlton writes that the “demand for 24-hour nurseries in common with the other demands was intended to cover the immediate needs of the most hard hit women including women night workers” (1975:6). However she notes that, while the concept of socialist childcare was crucial for the women's movement, as an isolated demand “plonked onto an alienating capitalist [system], it created formidable contradictions” (1975:6). Women's labour-market participation was only starting to increase in the 1960s and, hence “women outside Women's Liberation frequently argued that all the problems of caring for children in the isolation of their own home were preferable to the daily grind of some rotten job, given that money wasn't the deciding factor” (1975:6). Charlton argues that one of the problems with the demand was that it was asking for more of what already existed and hence “had limited appeal for those with a remnant of choice, both in and out of the movement” (1975:6).

What is striking about these reflections from activists the Women's Liberation Movement is that we can find so many of the contemporary conditions of motherhood and work/life balance present in the 1970s critique. It is hard not to note the similarities between the contemporary provision of 24-hour childcare, specifically the complex care arrangements of shift-workers and single mothers and that of Rodaway's concerns about the disruption and

difficulties that extended and flexible childcare would produce. What is also clear is that, for many women, the prospect of the daily grind of working-class employment meant that many opted for the labour of motherhood. Charlton's comment that money wasn't the deciding factor is telling in two respects, namely that equal pay for women had not yet been won and that the economic necessity of households to be dependent on two incomes had not yet become dominant.

It was around the question of childcare — what it is, who and what it is for — that persistent tensions emerged that highlighted the considerably different political perspectives regarding work, motherhood and women's oppression that existed within the women's movement. One approach to the question of caring for children, one that differed from making demands on the state for more or better nursery services, was the establishment of self-managed radical childcare projects. The Dartford Park Children's Community Centre opened in 1972 and was initiated by members of the Camden Women's Liberation group (Rowbotham 1989a). In *Childrens Community Centre: our experiences of collective childcare* (1974), a booklet of parent's experiences in establishing the Dartford Park Children's Community Centre, the authors write that:

the first idea for the Centre came from a group of women in the Women's Liberation Movement, some of whom had worked unsuccessfully on the campaign for 24-hour nurseries and who realised that the only way they would get nursery provision before their own children went to school would be to start their own nursery (Booklet 1974:3).

In addition, the authors note that "examples of the emotionally deprived 'latch-key' child<sup>30</sup>, the child brought up in institutions, are there to convince us that the ideal environment for the emotional stability of a child is one in which the relationship with its mother plays a dominant part" (Booklet 1974:10). Another booklet, *Out of the Pumpkin Shell* (1975) produced by "a group of women and men, parents and non-parents in the Women's Liberation playgroup in Birmingham" (1975:1) argues that "women's identity is ... very bound up with her role as a mother and this makes it very difficult

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<sup>30</sup> The 'latchkey-child' is so called because the child is provided with a key for getting into the home after school and spends at least part of the day alone and unsupervised when the parents are away at work.

to criticise that role” (1975:3). Pointing to the structural and economic implications of constructing of women as always-already mothers, they continue that “this over-intense inter-dependence of the mother and child seems to reflect a family structure which has more to do with the needs of capitalism for unpaid domestic labour, small units of consumption and mobility of labour than it had to do with what is good for the mother, father or child” (1975:3). Catherine Hall was also based in Birmingham at the time and recalls that:

of course it’s a ridiculous demand, twenty-four hour childcare, but we certainly did believe in the importance of proper provision of childcare and spent a lot of time talking about that and working on that, and setting up first the — what we called the baby playgroups and then a playgroup, which became the Women’s Liberation Playgroup (Sisterhood and After Oral Archive).

Through examining the numerous documents, leaflets and journals produced by the women’s movement that addressed the question of childcare as well as the recollections of those active at the time, a clear tension emerges with regard to the political question of caring for children. On one hand there was a vision of pre-figurative forms of childcare that rejected traditional nurseries “as hotbeds of sexist ideology and authoritarian organisation” (Charlton 1975) and imagined childcare that would address the isolation of mothers and challenge the structures of the nuclear family and the sexual division of domestic labour. On the other hand there was the argument that childcare enabled, and was needed for, women to choose whether or not to go out to work and that without better provision women would remain trapped in “semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, forming a pool of cheap and plentiful labour — to the great advantage of employer” (Leaflet: Brent Working Women’s Charter 1974).

The differences that existed between the political approaches to childcare become even more visible when the dissatisfaction with motherhood is analysed alongside the parallel development of demands and campaigns for gender equality in the workplace and discussions around equal pay. Rowbotham argues that equal rights at work was an issue that developed in parallel with dissatisfaction with the family and “several of the first women’s liberation movement groups began as equal-pay groups” (1989a:166).

In 1968, three years before 'equal pay' was to become one of the four original demands of the Women's Liberation Movement, women machinists at the Ford car factory in Dagenham went on strike over a grading dispute concerning pay. Their industrial action, lasting for three weeks, almost stopped production at all Ford plants in Britain and provided encouragement and confidence to women active in trade unions. One reflection of the contagious confidence and energy gained from the strike was the formation of the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights (NJACCWER), who organised the equal pay demonstration attended by around 1,000 people in Trafalgar Square on 18 May 1969.

The Ford strike in 1968 is considered one of the key events in the struggle for equal pay in Britain and is credited as being central in creating the political pressure that led to the passing of the Equal Pay Bill in 1970. The 1970 Act prohibited any less favourable treatment between men and women in terms of pay<sup>31</sup> (McDowell 2013). However, the gap between the formal rights afforded through progressive gender legalisation and the materiality of working women's lives was considerable and, as a result the Working Women's Charter Campaign (WWCC)<sup>32</sup> was launched by the London Trades Council in March 1974 (Leaflet: Working Women's Charter 1974). From its inception, the Working Women's Charter Campaign (WWCC) organised solidarity with strikes around Equal Pay (Conway 2013). The Charter also campaigned around broader gender demands such as maternity leave, free abortion and increases in family allowance. The Charter was comprised of ten demands with the sixth demand being the:

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<sup>31</sup> The campaign for formal equality at work and equal pay was far from over as the *Equal Pay Act* took five years to come into become law, coming into force on 29 December 1975. Additional legislative gains were made throughout the 1970s. The Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 made it illegal to discriminate against women in work, education and training and, in the same year, the Employment Protection Act introduced statutory maternity provision and made it illegal to sack a woman if she is pregnant. However, it was not until 1983 that the Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations allowed women to be paid the same as men for work of equal value. The restrictions on women working night shifts in factories were not lifted until 1986 (McDowell 2013).

<sup>32</sup> At its height the WWCC had 27 local groups in towns and cities across Britain and was supported by 12 national unions, 55 trade union branches, 37 trade councils and 85 other organizations; and also published a monthly newspaper (Nugent 2007). The driving force behind the WWCC was the International Marxist Group and the other organisations involved in the campaign the International Communist League, Workers Power and the Communist Party (Nugent 2007).



[i]mproved provision of local authority day nurseries, free of charge, with extended hours to suit working mothers. Provision of nursery classes in day nurseries. More nursery schools (Leaflet: Brent Working Women's Charter 1974).

The similarities of the Charter's demand for childcare with that of the Women's Liberation Movement are clear. While the demands are not exactly same, the difference in wording highlights that the tensions and disagreements about childcare were less about the content of the demand (both were concerned with extending and improving provision) and more about the way different feminists imagined childcare, specifically, what it enabled women to do.

The tensions, both practical and ideological between, on the one hand, demanding more childcare provision so that women could choose to work and, on the other, conceiving of childcare provision as necessary to transform the sexual division of labour by changing, not only who performed care, but also how and why caring activities took place, exposed a fault-line that existed in the women's movement. It was a fault-line that existed primary along divisions of class. It also illustrates some of the contradictions and tensions that are evident in the dual characteristics of reproducing labour-power, in that reproductive labour produces and reproduces us as workers and our children as future workers but, at the same time, it possesses a potential for disruption of traditional gender roles and the possibility for alternative value systems.

Rowbotham (1989a) argues that for most of the young middle-class women of the women's liberation movement, who were mostly students, young mothers or had just started working, equal pay at work was a remote concern in contrast to their personal concerns about representations of women in the media, childcare and relationships with left-wing men. However, while many middle-class and even some working-class families may not have needed additional household income from women's wages, labour statistics from 1971 show that a significant portion of women were working for wages with just over 50 percent of working age women in employment, though the majority of women workers were working on a part-time basis (McDowell

2013). The two different perspectives on childcare highlight different political tendencies and make visible the different life experiences and needs of women with children, needs and desires that were, and continue to be, constructed at the intersection of gender, race and class relations. During the 1970s the tensions within the women's movement regarding the different approaches to childcare persisted and Rowbotham writes that while "in later years they were to merge pragmatically, [they] remained theoretically unresolved"(1989a:132). These tensions capture the different class relations expressed in the aspirations for extended and more flexible childcare. The inability for these tensions to be easily resolved highlights the conflicts and disagreement within the women's movement and how different experiences of class intersect with constructions of what care should or could be and equally what liberation should, or could, be.

## **6.5 We Are All Housewives Now**

Our window on the world is looked through with our hands in the sink and we've begun to hate the sink and all it implies – so begins our consciousness - *Women and the Family* (1969).

In Chapter Three, *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Dalla Costa and James 1975) was discussed as one of the early interventions that initiated the domestic labour debate. In this section I analyse the text from a slightly difference perspective, re-reading it as an enunciation of the emerging crisis that the family wage system of male breadwinner and female unwaged carer model was entering in 1970s. In articulating the intersection of the economic and gendered dimensions of women's oppression, the text posits the working-class housewife as the central figure that organises and produces the female role in capitalist societies. The political demand and perspective of Wages for Housework that developed out of the text generated significant debate within the Women's Liberation Movement, however neither the perspective nor the demand were ever adopted by the majority of feminists active in the British Women's Liberation Movement.

To be sure, Dalla Costa and James were not alone, nor the first authors to identify the domestic sphere, the institution of family and the role of the housewife and experiences of motherhood as the starting point in which to analyse women's exploitation and oppression within capitalist societies. The New Left Review published in 1965 *The Housewife* by Suzanne Gail, an autobiographical text written by a married mother with a child. The publication in 1970 of *Women and the Family*, in *Shrew*, a collectively written account by "three women, each with two kids" (Malos 1980:7) emphasises the dynamic unity of the personal and the political and resonated with the 1960s view that the sexual and family roles of women were primarily seen as psychological or ideological. Throughout the early 1970s, considerable political energy and theoretical attention by feminists was devoted to arguing that women's domestic reproductive labour, often referred to as housework, was work. In the main their analysis developed from what Ann Oakley (1976a) identified as the main four characteristic features of the housewife role in modern capitalist societies; its exclusive allocation to women rather than to adults of both sexes, its association with economic dependence, its status of non-work — or its opposition to 'real', i.e. economically productive work and its primacy to women, its priority over other roles.

In *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1975), the construction of the housewife is posited as being produced through her lack of direct access to a wage, her isolation in the family home and dependency on her husband. Her passivity arises from the "advent of the capitalist mode of production" (1975:29) in which "capital rules and develops through the wage" (1975:27). The text connects women's confinement to the domestic family to the much longer history of the birth of capitalism and the separation of production from reproduction and also captures some of the specific historical arrangements of gender and labour relations in the post-war period. These were relations that reinforced and, in many ways, cemented women's role as unwaged reproductive workers in the home and encouraged white, British-born married women, indeed compelled them, to see domestic labour and motherhood as their primary aim and role in life (McDowell 2013:105).

The voice of the housewife, her dissatisfaction and desire for change that punctuates the text is a critique of the dominant and naturalised role of

married women in the home that prevailed in the post-war era. The text posits that women's struggle is primarily within the family, "the social relations of the waged to the unwaged - the family - is integral to the social relation which is capital itself — the wage relation" (1975:16). The text's insistence that the hidden nature of women's role within the family exposes that "precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organized" (1975:28) and that "every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home" (1975:38).

Reflecting the women's movement's long-standing connection to, and also dissatisfaction with, the trade union movement in Britain, *Power of Women and Subversion of the Community* constantly references and foregrounds class struggle and insists that housewives are central to the working-class and that, by extension, their inclusion in the definition of working-class subjectivity opens up "a new compass for class struggle" (1975:38). This perspective of housewives as central to definitions and conceptualisations of the working-class differed from the dominant socialist feminist argument that women needed to join the waged workforce so as to be able to 'join the working-class' (Federici 2012:110).

Discursively, the text resists being thought of as belonging to either of the tendencies that Rowbotham identifies as the main impetuses for the women's movement; it disrupts both the discourse of liberation from a destiny of being confined to the domestic sphere, as well as the discourse of more equality in the workplace. One way of reading the text is to argue that it attempted to bring the two discourses of liberation and equality together through the figure of the working-class housewife, in as much as it provides a strong critique of the wage system and the unrecognised and naturalised work of women in the household however, at the same time, the text revalues the work of the housewife as, not only necessary, but as fundamental to the reproduction of the economic and social relations of capitalism.

I would also posit that the text's publication in 1972 sits at the cusp of the waning of one regime of power as the post-war economic boom begins to fade and the emergence of the next, the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s. The text defiantly faces the post-war era, calling for women to both struggle against their destiny defined by domesticity and, at the same time, insists on

the necessity for and highlights the immense value that such domesticity produces for capitalism. The text resists any nostalgia for the post-war boom and makes visible the unwaged and unaccounted work that millions of women performed in making and remaking the workers that reconstructed Britain. It is an attempt to denaturalise and expose the layers of obligation, guilt and love embodied in the hours of work of reproduction. The text also expresses an overwhelming dissatisfaction with the family wage system and of the unequal power relations that are produced by the allocation of wages to men and the corresponding dependency and wagelessness of his wife and children.

However, the text does not just face the post-war period. Its publication in 1972 also captures the increasing number of women who were working not only at home as housewives but also in waged employment. The text is written at the beginning of the sharp increases in number of mothers joining the paid workforce. However it offers a critique— a feminist warning of sorts — forcefully arguing that women’s liberation does not lie in equality with men at work and that waged work will not set women free:

Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus which created the [women’s] movement — the rejection by millions of women of women’s traditional place — to recompose the work force with increasing numbers of women [....] For we have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies, by hand and in machines. (Dalla Costa and James 1975:49).

The insistence that women “refuse the myth of liberation through work” (1975:49) provides an early critique of the expansion and deepening of the double shift for women that Arlie Hochschild was to explore some ten years later in *The Second Shift*<sup>33</sup> (1983). The text urges us to consider that, without a reconfiguration and transformation of domestic work, the increasing amount of waged work performed by women would be in addition to, as opposed to instead of housework and care work.

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<sup>33</sup> When it was published in 1989, the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* called *The Second Shift* “a scream in the dark” and the *New York Times Book Review* wrote: “The best discussion I have read of what must be the quintessential domestic bind of our time”.

The development of the political perspective and campaign for Wages for Housework that followed the publication of *The Power of Women and Subversion of the Community* further develops this insight, insisting that access to wages was necessary for women to gain economic, social and political autonomy and independence from men. However, in contrast to an emphasis on women's increased employment outside the home, the Wages for Housework campaign demanded an income for all those who did reproductive work. In the context of capitalism that operates as an economic system affording value via the wage, the Wages for Housework campaign was an attempt to revalue domestic work as compared to an escape from it.

Circling back to the echo of 24-hour childcare and it is interesting to consider why the political perspective of Wages for Housework was, in the main, resisted and critiqued within the women's movement. One reading of the resistance to the demand is that it was a response, indeed a negative one, to the political vision of the Wages for Housework campaign, specifically, their attempt to bring together the divergent aspirations of equality and independence. Much of the critique and criticism from within the women's movement was a rejection of the device of the housewife that was so central to the politics of Wages for Housework. For many women in the movement, the figure of the housewife was unappealing in so far as it flattened middle-class aspirations of making something of one's life, implicitly something more than the domestic role of the housewife. Neither was the demand of employment equality, for being treated and paid as an equal to men, present in the Wages for Housework campaign and the figure of the housewife. These different aspirations were produced overwhelmingly from different class locations, as discourses that operated within and against the relations of gender and class from which the 'woman question' emerged. It is not that they are completely incompatible, more that the attempt to combine them through a figure of the housewife resulted in neither aspiration finding adequate expression.

Despite the early projects and desires for pre-figurative childcare and the strong critique of the nuclear family, as the 1970s and 1980s progressed the women's movement increasingly focused on new concerns (Gill and Scharff 2011) including questions of gender representation and male violence against

women. In the main, the question of work was narrowed to one of equality in the workplace and on increasing women's access to employment, focusing on more choice and opportunities in employment. These shifts in emphasis occurred alongside broader changes to government regimes, specifically from the post-war period to that of neoliberalism. During the 1970s women's aspiration for equality in the workplace occurred alongside the destruction of the male family wage system which, in turn, produced the economic necessity for more women to work. By investigating the echo of the demand for extended and flexible childcare and making visible the fault-line of class within the women's movement, what emerges are different aspirations and resistant desires in relation to waged employment and motherhood. For many working women, waged employment was not understood to be the path to liberation, it was, however, a site in which one could aspire to and demand equality.

## **5.6 Locating Race in the Memory of 1968**

The story so far has traced the emergence of the women's movement in the early 1970s focusing on two parallel developments: women's dissatisfaction with the domestic role of motherhood and the demands for equality in the workplace. However, this narrative of the birth of second-wave feminism is disrupted when analysed alongside the emergence of the Black Women's Movement during the same period. While there have always been many feminisms, there was also more than one women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Viewed from the location of the multiple spaces of women's struggle, the overwhelming whiteness of the Women's Liberation Movement is brought into a sharp light. By examining the Black Women's Movement within the context of the echo of the demand for extended and flexible childcare, it becomes possible to question whose history has been preserved in the memory of feminism and to whom the aspirations for an independent life and for equality with men spoke to. Such an investigation is not solved by crudely adding 'race' to the list of class and gender, but instead involves focusing on the dynamics and normative operation of whiteness, to recover the experiences and bodies bleached out of history and to interrogate how the

demands and experiences of Black women in 1970s Britain complicated feminist aspirations for independence and equality.

The year 1968 proved to be long year of considerable global change and revolt. Outside Britain, students and workers revolted in France and President Nixon was elected in the US. In Britain, 1968 saw the *Abortion Act* (1967) come into effect and the women workers at Ford Dagenham go on strike. It was also the year the then Labour Government passed an important amendment to the *Race Relations Act* (1968)<sup>34</sup>. Despite considerable opposition, notably Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in which he spoke against the core principles of racial equality, the *Race Relations Bill* (1968) was passed and made it illegal to refuse housing, employment or public services to people because of their ethnic background (McDowell 2013).

The *Race Relations Act* (1968) contrasted, however, with the *Commonwealth Immigrants Bill* (1968) passed in the same year. The *Commonwealth Immigrants Act* (1968) extended and sharpened the restrictions passed in the *Commonwealth Immigration Act* (1962). Both the 1962 and 1968 Acts increased restrictions on migration from the former British colonies and introduced the necessity of workers to have employment vouchers to gain entry to the UK (McDowell 2013). These two expressions of race relations move in different directions. In one direction, towards a framework of formal racial equality with legislation and, in the other direction, Britain's post-war dependence on migrant labour was reconfigured to restrict the flow of migrants who came from places that could be understood as producing people from a 'different ethnic background'. This disjuncture marks the contested, volatile and contradictory discourses of class, race and ethnicity that proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain.

Tracing the separate yet connected development of the different women's movements, Gail Lewis, who grew up in a mixed race family in post-war London, reflects that the organisation of the Black Women's Movement ran in

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<sup>34</sup> Bryan *et al.* argue that the Race Relations Act (1966) far from outlawing racist attitudes, in fact entrenched them. The 1966 Act outlawed individual acts of incitement to racial hatred in places of public resort but, as the authors argue, "left racism virtually unchallenged in every other area of our lives, such as housing, employment etc" (1985:27). In many ways the 1968 amendment sought, at a formal level, to address the inadequacy of the 1966 Act.



parallel to Women's Liberation Movement and that, while it was influenced by the 'Women's Question', it was not secondary to the Women's Liberation Movement (Lewis 2009). She posits that the two primary influences that shaped the emergence of the Black Women's Movement in Britain were the anti-imperialist movement and the rise of Black Power in the US (Lewis 2009). The anti-imperialist movements for independence and decolonisation that took place during the post-war period, as well as the growing consciousness of Black Power, both in the US and in Britain, impacted on notions of belonging, of settlement and produced a connection to events and politics happening 'back home'. In *The Heart of the Race*, Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanna Scafe (1985) argue that the emergence of the first Black women's caucuses in Black Power organisations enabled Black women who shared similar political backgrounds to come together, as women, to discuss "our common experiences of racial and sexist oppression" (1985:148) .

The insights developed by Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, as well as the reflections by activists gathered together in *Oral Histories of the Black Women's Movement* archive are important as they offer a corrective to the idea that the Black Women's Movement grew solely out of black women's (negative) experiences in the Women's Liberation Movement. They suggest that it was the intersection of race and gender, as well as class, for many Black women in Britain, emerging from their experiences of organising within male dominated Black organisation that provided the context for their self-organisation. By 1973 women in south London had formed the Brixton Black Women's Group, which was originally a small reading group but grew over the years. "We didn't even bother with a name. We were just the Black Women's Group. We came mainly out of Black organisation" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:149)<sup>35</sup>. The expansion throughout the 1970s of local Black Women's groups across Britain and, in particular, in London saw the first National Black Women's Conference held in 1978, an event that provided much of the energy and national organisation for the formation of the

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<sup>35</sup> Some of the original founders of the Brixton Black Women's Group were Gerlin Bean, Olive Morris and Susan Scafe and the Brixton group worked with other local Black Women's Groups in Haringey and Manchester (Lewis 2009).

Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) in 1978 (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985).

The argument that foregrounds the influences of both anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, as well as that of Black Power, in the emergence of the Black Women's Movement is not a claim that Black and Asian women were not involved in the Women's Liberation Movement. Of course some women of colour were and many also attended meetings and conferences. Femi Otitoju reflects on attending the national Women's Liberation Conference in Birmingham in 1978 and recalls that she felt "out of my depth in terms of class, politics and age" (Otitoju 2009). She did, however, join a consciousness-raising group in Hackney and worked on the London Women's Liberation newsletter (Otitoju 2009). Her memories of the Women's Liberation Movement were of a mainly white and middle-class movement and she joined OWAAD in the early 1980s.

The articulation of the need for autonomous black women's organisation was expressed and drawn from the realities of black women experiencing the "triple oppression of class, gender and racism" (Leaflet: National Black Women's Conference 1978). The need for Black women's autonomy was also a critique of the Women's Liberation Movement and the effective exclusion of black women — exclusion that occurred through the ways in which the Women's Liberation Movement prioritised and framed 'women's issues'. The concern raised by black activists was that the Women's Liberation Movement did not focus on issues that were important or relevant in their articulation for Black women.

The complexity of the dynamics of exclusion can be further examined through an analysis of one of the original four demands of the Women's Liberation Movement: the demand and subsequent campaign for free contraception and abortion on demand. It was not that access to abortion and contraception were not an 'issue' for Black women, it was that for many Black women, the triple oppression of class, gender and race combined to produce considerable difference to that of white women's experiences of pregnancy and family planning services. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe write that, in response to the demand for 'free contraception and abortion on demand', Black women had to point out that "we have always been given abortions more readily than

white women and are indeed often encouraged to have terminations we didn't ask for" (1985:105).

One of the anonymised contributors in *The Heart of the Race* articulates the racialised context in which the politics of reproduction played out on the bodies of Black women; "it's about racism. They don't want us here anymore and they don't need our kids to work for them, so it's easier just to quietly kill us off" (1985:105). In addressing this complexity of the racialised dynamics of reproductive freedom, one of the demands that emerged from the Black Women's Movement was the campaign to "Ban the Jab" (Leaflet: Ban The Jab 1979), a community campaign against the long-term injectable contraceptive Depo Provera. The campaign aimed to have the drug withdrawn, to highlight the side effects of the drug and to expose the way in which Depo-Provera was developed with mass scale testing of women in the Third World. In addition, the Black women also raised the demand of "having the right to choose to have our children, planned and unplanned" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:105).

What is also striking is what is absent and unsaid in the concerns and campaigns of the Women's Liberation Movement; specifically, the lack of any serious feminist attention concerning the changes to immigration laws via the *Commonwealth Immigration Act (1968)* and the *Immigration Act (1971)* is stark. In contrast to such absences and silences, the interlocking issues of nationality, citizenship and immigration, often expressed through specific 'know your rights' information as well as campaigns concerning the various implications of the new immigration policies, were highly visible in the publications and newsletters that circulated within Black Women's Groups. As such, it is useful to stress that the demands and articulation of 'the Woman Question' by the majority of the Women's Liberation Movement failed to incorporate the experiences of Black and Asian women in Britain. In addition, the question of labour and its intersection with migration was also absent in the politics of reproductive justice that dominated the white feminist movement, specifically the attempts by women of colour to provide for their families and to keep their families together.

The feminist perspective that women's oppression originates in the structure of the family stands in contrast to many of the issues that Black women were

facing in post-war Britain including “issues of survival, like housing, education and police brutality” (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:149). Analysis of the archival material from the Black Women’s movement reveals a series of differentiated and discontinuous experiences in comparison to the histories and narratives of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Many women of colour were critical of the presentation of a universalised female experience of womanhood that failed to incorporate the multitude of ‘other’ experiences that intersect with gender.

With regard to the recomposition of class relations that was emerging in the late 1960s, certainly by 1968 the British post-war economy was starting to falter. One indication that the boom years were unravelling was the ‘Britain Working Harder’ campaign initiated in 1968 by Harold Wilson, the then Labour Prime Minister. The campaign called for greater productivity without extra financial reward and signalled the decade to come; one marked by deindustrialisation and industrial unrest as British workers struggled against falling wages and declining job opportunities, structured by the fact that Britain’s global share of work manufactured outputs had already fallen from about a quarter in 1950 to about one-tenth in 1970 (McDowell 2013:131). From this perspective it is possible to trace the emergence of neoliberalism as one that was uneven, occurring in fits and starts and one that certainly had started to take shape in the years before the Thatcher administration.

The shift from an economy based on manufacturing jobs to one dominated by employment in the service industries can be, and often is, analysed as one that increased employment opportunities for women. Indeed, the shift altered the traditional gender role of male breadwinner/female unwaged caring. (McDowell 2013:131). However, running parallel to increased employment opportunities for women, is the destruction of well-paid, unionised manufacturing jobs and the expansion of low-paid, precarious and devalued service jobs. It was this work — service and care work — that overwhelming became the waged occupation of women. By the 1970s the previous system of the family wage as a mechanism that organised labour both outside and inside the home was starting to unravel. The post-war period of economic expansion in which output and standards of living rose, delivered via the welfare state and (male) family wages — a level of wages that was sufficient

to reproduce the male worker and his family — was disappearing. Diverse and complex forces including economic restructuring and women's desire for change brought about the restructuring of the previous regime of labour organisation that had dominated the post-war period. The changes to reproduction and the subjectivity of motherhood that began in the 1970s as a result of both women's struggles and economic restructuring did not emerge out of nowhere. It is useful to trace some of the major discursive and non-discursive formations that circulated prior to the changes in the 1970s. The next chapter focuses on the immediate period before, namely post-war Britain up until the publication in 1972 of *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Unwaged Reproductive Labour And The Family Wage

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Talk about women coming back from the Forces not wanting to be housewives seems to me to be just nonsense, because nowhere else but in her own home is woman in such command; only in her own home is she free, if she has the courage to spread herself, to express herself, to find her whole self – Donald Winnicott (1944) *Their Standards and Yours*, BBC broadcast.

#### 7.1 Inside and Out

The story so far of how reproductive labour functions under neoliberalism has involved an investigation of the interrelation between the production of the subjectivity of motherhood and the political economy of reproduction. It has focused on two separate, yet interconnected, moments: the emergence of neoliberalism as a governing political rationality and women's movements in the late 1960s and 1970s that critiqued the gendered and racialised organisation of labour inside and outside the home. However, to be able to sufficiently grasp these two moments and their interrelation, the exploration of history cannot extend to only the 1970s. It is necessary to examine the conditions that existed in the immediate period before the 1970s, namely post-war Britain.

This chapter examines the construction of post-war motherhood and traces some of the transformations that occurred to the reproductive realm in the period from the end of the Second World War to the early 1970s. The chapter returns to *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1972) and analyses the gendered and racialised dynamics of the family wage and domestic work as expressed in the text. In tracing the boundaries and elements of how the domestic sphere and the family wage are imagined and discussed in the post-war period, certain sites of conflict and considerable 'concern' become visible. There is something in the operation of concern as a

mode of governance that is worthwhile noting; concern expresses an affective state that delineates a subject as a matter of interest and importance but also produces a sense of anxiety and worry. It is these concerns, of adequate motherhood, of population decline and reconstructing the family that frame this chapter and I consider how they both construct and deconstruct motherhood and reproductive labour in the post-war period.

One site of considerable concern is the construction of the family as the central unit in society and the corresponding gendered and racialised constructions of women as full-time mothers and housewives. The post-war construction of women as mothers and housewives became intertwined and inescapable from ideas of intensive and continuous motherhood; a mode of parenting made popular by the work of various post-Freudian psychologists, in particular, Dr. John Bowlby and his theories of maternal deprivation (Riley 1983b, Thane and Evans 2013). Furthermore, the racialised constructions of post-war motherhood enabled certain women to be considered 'good' mothers and wives and others who, by virtue of their waged work, ethnicity, marital status or age, were excluded from such categories.

Another site of concern that emerges is the reconstruction of the British economy and the Keynesian economic strategies of growth; specifically those of individual consumption of household commodities and the family wage structure. The chapter focuses on economic strategies for growth and expansion analysed within the framework of the welfare state's 'economy of life' and modes of governance based on a judicial form of life insurance that are "not only interested in the productive life of the worker, but the reproductive life of the nation as a whole" (Cooper 2008:7). In particular, the chapter explores the connections and tensions involved, on the one hand, by women's role within the family as the always-already unwaged reproductive workers of capitalism and, on the other, the formation of the welfare state and discourse of the family wage. Framing this in another way we could ask how the family wage, a discourse that organised both the waged work of men and the unwaged reproductive work of women, came to be so dominant in the post-war era in Britain? One way of answering the question is to start on the surface, by breaking apart the term into its two threads. One thread follows the development and organisation of the family and the other thread tracks

the economic conditions of the wage within the context of the British Keynesian welfare state.

My argument in this chapter is that it is possible to examine the mechanisms through which the family was rehabilitated, in particular the family's central, yet contested, role in economic and social post-war policies via an analysis of the various Royal Commissions and government reports of the period. The following reports are analysed in this chapter: *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), *Royal Commission on Population* (1949), *The Royal Commission on Divorce* (1956). These reports were very much concerned with "bio-political" (Foucault 2007) questions of divorce and marriage, health care, population rates and child welfare. The centrality of the family is also present in the specific pro-natalist policies and governmental strategies concerning birth rates and population growth that dominated the early post-war years (Riley 1983b).

The history of the family and motherhood in the post-war period can also be analysed from the perspective of how the conditions of reproductive labour were managed and, also, how they changed; changes that produced the possibility for feminists in the 1970s to take critical aim at the family, the subjectivity of motherhood and the family wage system as both institutions and ideologies. In other words, how were feminists in the 1970s able to have "so forcefully deconstructed state supported female reproductive labour?" (Cooper 2008). Here I am referring to the multitude of feminist voices, reaching far beyond the Wages for Housework campaign that articulated unwaged domestic reproductive activities as not only work, but as the central site of female exploitation and expropriation while also tearing shreds into the naturalised and essential narrative of domestic life and women's role in the family.

From this perspective, the concept of the 'population' "is not the simple sum of individuals inhabiting a territory. Nor is it solely the result of their will to reproduce. The population is not a primary datum; it is dependent on a series of variables" (Foucault 2007:70). Like disciplinary techniques and processes of power, the technologies of bio-power are addressed to a multiplicity. However, bio-power is addressed to that multiplicity in so far as they form a mass affected by the biological processes of life itself: birth and death, health



and illness. Following Foucault, in addition to disciplinary forms of power that came to hold sway over the bodies of individuals, was the emergence, in the eighteenth century, of techniques and technologies of bio-power. Bio-power is tied to the emergence of the discipline of statistical demography and its emergence witnesses the quantification of the phenomena of birth-rate, longevity, the reproductive rates and fertility of a given population, its state of health, patterns of diet and habitation. These issues were central to modes of governance and the formation of the welfare state in Britain. Central to the technologies of bio-power is the figure of the mother and, I argue, that the construction of post-war motherhood was a device that functioned both as a means of organising the population by including some and necessarily excluding others and as a site of resistance and contestation.

## **7.2 Abolition of Want as a Practicable Post-War Aim**

This section investigates the interconnected aspects of the family wage system and the gendered separations that were central to the creation of the welfare state. In *Power of Women and Subversion of the Community*, the construction of the housewife, her centrality to the “Woman Question” (1975:21) is produced by an equally central discourse of the family, domestic labour and the wage system. The text begins from the assumption that the common experience of women (excluding the very rich) is one that involves a commonality with regard to reproductive labour, “all women are housewives and even those who work outside the home continue to be” (Dalla Costa 1975:21). This assumption speaks to the centrality of the family wage system during the post-war period. The family wage was a form of labour organisation that presupposed not only the normative formation of the family to reproduce and socialise labour-power, but also the existence of full-time male wages that were sufficient, or are nearly sufficient, to reproduce the ‘average’ family. The nearly sufficient nature of the family wage to reproduce the ‘average’ family points to the actually existing and constant presence of women in waged employment throughout the history of capitalism.

Here emerges one of the contradictions of that remains central to the 'Woman Question'. Women have indeed had a constant presence as waged workers throughout the different modes of capitalist production; from being the first waged workers, alongside children in the industrial factories of Victorian England;<sup>36</sup> to the millions of women employed in wartime industries during both World Wars; to women's employment as waged workers, predominately employed part-time in the post-war economic expansion<sup>37</sup>. However, despite the reality of women as waged workers, the construction of women as waged workers sits in tension with the constructions of women as full-time mothers and as the unwaged reproductive workers of capitalism. This contradiction is one that also animated debates in the Victorian and Edwardian periods (McClintock 1995). It remained unresolved in post-war Britain and was often made more opaque by the construction of women's wages as 'pin money', as a supplement to the family income rather than a vital contribution (McDowell 2013:105). From a feminist perspective, there is a necessary claim to be made in the statement that 'women have always worked'. While at the same time, recognising that the distribution of employment between women and, crucially, their labour conditions have been highly uneven and structured by race, migration and class relations.

As important as the history of women's waged work is, it is, however, useful to set aside the historical necessity and fluctuations to women's participation in the waged labour market for a moment, so as to be able to capture the position that the vast majority of women and households found themselves in during the post-war period: a period that, at least statistically, was unusual not only in terms of the organisation of women's waged work but also more broadly. In *Working Lives: Gender, Migration and Employment in Britain, 1945-2007*, Linda McDowell provides a useful snapshot of the crisis facing the British economy in the immediate post-war period, as one in which the economy had been weakened by the war years and was desperately short on

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<sup>36</sup> See Marx's detailed discussion in chapter ten of *Capital, Volume I*.

<sup>37</sup> In 1951 only 35 percent of adult women were employed in the waged workforce, however by 1971 the number had jumped to 53 percent (Lewis, 1986), throughout the post-war years women's participation in the waged labour market continued to increase.

labour. She notes that half a million houses had been destroyed during the war and a further quarter of a million damaged and that the housing crisis was exacerbated by the five million members of the armed forces that had to be demobilised and many of them re-housed. The population was also poorly fed, with rationing still in place until 1951. Life in Britain in the second half of the 1940s was a period that David Kynaston describes as:

Shops on every corner, pubs on every corner, cinemas in every high street,...smoke, smog... No launderettes, no automatic washing machines, wash day every Monday, clothes boiled in a tub, put through a mangle, hung out to dry. Central heating rare, coke boilers, water geysers, the coal fire, the hearth, the home, chilblains common. Abortion legal, homosexual relationships illegal, suicide illegal, capital punishment legal. White faces everywhere (2007: 18 cited in McDowell 2013:73).

McDowell argues that it was the beginning of the 1950s, rather than the immediate post-war years, that were the beginning of a period of significant change, “marked by an accelerating discontinuity with the past” (2013:102). In 1950, the population of Britain was just over 50 million, the average male salary was £100 per year, three-quarters of all families lived in rented housing, a quarter of all homes still had no electricity and the same proportion had no indoor WC, and just over a third of all adult women were waged workers— 35 percent in 1951 (McDowell 2013:101). However, while the post-war reconstruction and redistribution of wealth was uneven and distributed differently according to geography (Todd 2008), by the mid-1950s many lower middle- and working-class households were becoming relatively more comfortable with rising wages, access to social housing and the introduction of the NHS and welfare state benefits<sup>38</sup>. Both McDowell (2013:102) and Todd (2008) highlight that the post-war consumption boom was fuelled by increases in disposable income and also by the availability of consumer credit as working-class households were able to purchase goods such as TVs, and furniture ‘on tick’.

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<sup>38</sup> The *Holidays with Pay Act* (1938), though passed in 1938, was widely implemented in the 1950s. In the early 1950s, 25million British people were able to afford to spend a few days away from home each year. In terms of household consumption in the mid-1950s, 4.5million households had a TV set, a figure that had risen from only 15,000 in 1946 (McDowell 2013).

By the mid-1950s, the 'family wage' represented the man's wage rather than the pooled contributions of the different family members, which had previously included older children and women's wages (Roberts 1984, Lewis 1986). In effect, the family wage had replaced the 'household budget' and, as such, one outcome was that the entire family was usually dependent on the husband for financial subsistence. This shift in earning power and modes of dependency reconfigured many working-class households, to such an extent that it is possible to argue that the development and deployment of the family wage, in conjunction with the development of the welfare state, structured and organised the unwaged domestic reproductive sphere and the post-war subjectivity of motherhood; by which I mean there is something to be understood in the specificity of the post-war period, in particular of the gendered and racialised organisation the domestic sphere, of the wage system and the related formation of the welfare state.

December 1942 saw the publication of the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), commonly referred to as the Beveridge Report, after the committee's chairman, Sir William Beveridge<sup>39</sup>. The report is widely considered a major contribution to the post-war reconstruction of the nation, the 'British' race and importantly, the family. The report, published before the Second World War had ended, consciously understood itself to be both undertaking reconstruction and producing the future: "a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching" (Beveridge 1942:6). Nor did it restrict its recommendations and scope to monetary benefits, arguing that the "organisation of social insurance should be treated as one part only of a comprehensive policy of social progress" (Beveridge 1942:6). The report identified "five giants" (Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness) that

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<sup>39</sup> Beveridge published widely on unemployment and social security. His most notable works being *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (1909), *Planning Under Socialism* (1936), *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1944), *Pillars of Security* (1943), *Power and Influence* (1953), and *A Defence of Free Learning* (1959). Beveridge was considered an authority on unemployment insurance from early in his career. He served under Winston Churchill on the Board of Trade as Director of the newly-created labour exchanges and, later, after the First World War, as Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Food. The Fabians appointed him director of the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1919, a post he held until 1937. He took up Mastership of University College, Oxford in 1937 before joining the government in 1940.

needed to be attacked on the road to reconstruction, arguing that “social insurance fully developed may provide income security; it is an attack upon Want” (Beveridge 1942:6).

The report’s recommendations for a social insurance system are “based on a diagnosis of want” (Beveridge 1942:8) that are derived from facts, drawn “from the conditions of the people as revealed by social surveys between the two wars” (Beveridge 1942:8). In addition to addressing the giant question of Want, the report outlines two other reasons for developing a system of social security. The first was the aging population “that persons past the age that is now regarded as the end of working life will be a much larger proportion of the whole community that at any time in the past” (Beveridge 1942:8). The second, related to the first, was the low birth rate, of which the report concludes, “Unless this rate is raised very materially in the near future, a rapid and continuous decline of the population cannot be prevented” (Beveridge 1942:8). The report argues that the low birth rate “makes it imperative to give first place in social expenditure to the care of childhood and to the safeguarding of maternity” (Beveridge 1942:8).

The plan for social security that the report outlines lists six classes “four main classes of working age and two other below and above working age respectively” (Beveridge 1942:10). Housewives, “that is married women of working age” (Beveridge 1942:10), were considered a separate class from both employees and self-employed traders and independent workers. The report recommended that all six classes be covered for medical treatment and for funeral expenses. Housewives were to receive maternity grants, provision for widowhood and retirement pensions “by virtue of their husbands contributions” (Beveridge 1942:10) and were not eligible for unemployment or disability benefits by virtue of them not being considered employees or self-employed. The assumption in the report was that married women (regardless of whether they had children) would not be engaged in paid work and could, therefore, be classified as dependent, with the wife’s benefits payable through her husband’s insurance. The imperative to safeguarding maternity amounted to viewing women’s most important work as ensuring “the continuation of the British race” (Beveridge 1942:53). Jane Lewis (1992) makes the point that Beveridge’s vision of married women as ‘non-working’

housewives fitted the 1930s much more than either his wartime world, during which millions of women participated in the workforce or, as it transpired the post-war world.

After the landslide victory of Clement Attlee's Labour Party in 1945, many of the Beveridge Report's recommendations for social security reform were implemented and in 1948, the *National Insurance Act* (1948), *National Assistance Act* (1948) and *National Health Service Act* (1948) came into force and formed the central components of the modern British welfare state. Beveridge's conviction that adult women would be economically dependent on their husbands became embedded in the post-war social security legislation which, in turn had a regulatory effect on the lives of women. Significantly "the Beveridge model of married women's entitlements to social security was not reversed until the mid 1970s" (Lewis 1992:21). The need to safeguard maternity, often expressed as protecting mothers, was framed and reinforced through the production of married women's dependence.

Following the formation of the welfare state, in the following year in 1949, the Royal Commission on Population published its recommendations amid widespread concerns about the low birth rate in Britain. The remit of the Royal Commission on Population, established in 1944, had been "to examine the facts relating to the present population trends in Great Britain; to investigate the causes of these trends and to consider their probable consequences" (Benjamin and Menzler 1959). The considerable concern and fear about the low birth rate was expressed through not only the survival of the British 'race', but was also related to chronic labour-shortages both during the war and in the immediate post-war period. Indeed, "population-fall anxiety acted as a backdrop to all proclamations and speculations on women, work, the nation and the family throughout the war" (Riley 1983b:156).

After five years deliberation (during which time the birth-rate increased significantly), in 1949 the Royal Commission on Population recommended a series of broad-ranging reforms with the aim of assisting families and with the hope of increasing family sizes. A glaring omission in the report was any concrete recommendations concerned with making paid employment for women with children more attractive. Instead, the reforms focused on making motherhood more attractive, including "advocating larger family allowances,

rest homes for mothers, sitters-in for children, nursery schools and children's playgrounds" (Lewis 1992:17). The report considered these reforms crucial to ensure that the population did not fall below replacement level, contributing to what Riley describes as a climate of pro-natalist opinion, which she describes as "that despondency and alarm over the low birth rate, both past and as anticipated by demographers, which took the situation to the problem to be encouraging women to have more children; four per family was a widely agreed target" (1983b:152).

Present in both the Beveridge Report and the recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Population are a series of concerns focused on securing the national interest in the post-war period. However, these concerns pulled in two different directions. On the one hand, there was the perceived need to reconstruct the family and increase the population through more births and, on the other hand, there was an immediate need for more labour-power to be able to undertake the considerable work involved in reconstruction. In the first instance, the family is constructed as the necessary and natural site to address the so-called 'suicide birth rate'. The centrality of the family was also produced through a discourse that reaffirmed the separate roles for husband (worker) and wife (mother).

The other urgent concern with regards to the reconstruction of Britain was the acute post-war labour shortages and the prospect of an aging population. These tensions are evident in the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Population in that there was an obvious concern as to how to encourage larger family sizes but, at the same time, there was also a recognised need to address labour shortages. One seemingly obvious solution to this would have been to encourage and support the employment of women with children, for example, by keeping open the extensive network of wartime nurseries that had been established to increase women's labour participation during the war (Riley 1983b). However, while encouraging and supporting the employment of married women with small children would have certainly addressed the labour shortages, it would have required a different, indeed radically different, construction of motherhood and the family, as well as a reconfiguration of the naturalised, gendered division of labour.

Faced with chronic labour shortages (especially in sectors deemed crucial to the reconstruction programme — including the production of raw materials, food and the public sector — that were essential to the running of the economy) and an unwillingness to encourage the employment of married women with children, the British government turned instead towards in-migration as a solution to labour shortages (McDowell 2013:75).

Thus in 1946, there began a complex process of recruitment from widely separated geographical regions, both from territories with attachments to British imperial and colonial history and from those with no connection at all, other than through the accidents of war (McDowell 2013:76).

This turn towards in-migration to solve labour shortages is analysed in the following section through examining the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women migrants in the post-war period.

### **7.3 Race, Labour and Motherhood**

In the first chapter of *The Heart of the Race*, “Labour Pains: Black Women and Work”, the authors and contributors sketch an often obscured narrative of the connection between Black women’s experiences of work in Britain and that “our experiences of work over the past five centuries.... has been one long tradition of back-breaking labour in the service of European capitalism” (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:17). The narrative is one that focuses on the experiences and perspectives of those who answered the recruitment call of the Mother Country<sup>40</sup>. The authors write “as Black women arriving in Britain from the Caribbean after the Second World War we were well prepared for the hard work we came here to do: our lives had been shaped and moulded by the inescapable need to find or create the work which would maintain us” (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:21).

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<sup>40</sup> One contributor in *The Heart of the Race* writes: “I came here independently, because everybody was saying ‘come to England’...They were saying that there were better opportunities and jobs, and everyone was signing up to go and work in England. I wasn’t recruited. I didn’t need to be. I think the Queen came over and was broadcast on the radio, saying that we should come over and work to build up the Mother Country” (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:22).



In the various waves of migration that occurred in the post-war period, women comprised a significant number of arrivals and were recruited to fill specific 'female' roles in the health, care and manufacturing industries. While some Black women came to Britain to join husbands who had travelled ahead of them, many more came independently as recruits or made their own way in search of employment. Survey data from 1961, highlights "not only that the number of Black women who emigrated was equal to the number of men, but that nearly three-quarters of the women were single" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:25). The post-war migration from the former colonies was produced by the search for employment opportunities or better education for children and the desire to escape the treadmill of poverty. Together with the experiences of inequality and poverty that were overwhelmingly the legacy of colonialism, the powerful discourse of the possibility of 'a better life' produced the conditions for many thousands of migrants to leave their homes. However the work that they were able to secure "rarely afforded us the opportunities we had hoped for" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:23).

All we wanted was a decent education for the children. I didn't even have to work when we were at home, but once I got here I had to find a job. It was hard, especially when you would go for a job and they would always say it was gone. Eventually I found a cleaning job in a hospital, which I have had for twenty-two years (contributor cited in Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:24).

On the receiving end of profoundly racist policies and attitudes from both employers and fellow workers, Black women arriving in post-war Britain had few other options than to fill vacancies that others were not willing or inclined to do in the servicing, semi-skilled and unskilled sectors. "Service work was little more than institutionalised housework, as night and daytime cleaners, canteen workers, laundry workers and chambermaids— an extension of the work we had done under colonialism in the Caribbean" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:25). The alternative to service-based work was factory work where pay and conditions were poor and where Black women:

worked side by side with other immigrants from Asia, Ireland and southern Europe, producing the food, clothes, shoes and light household goods which were so essential to Britain's post-war economic boom (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:25).

Here too we can note the similarities with the life story of Joy, as outlined in Chapter One, whose mother worked three jobs, including as a cleaner. The point that must be stressed here is that it was not just the labour-power of migrants from the former colonies that was so essential to the economic boom; it was that such labour had been produced and structured as relatively cheap. In the case of migrants from the Caribbean and south Asian continent, the relative cheapness of their labour was produced by overt and institutionally racist employment policies and practices and, also, by British workers who “felt threatened by our presence ... even though our arrival usually ensured their own promotion to less tedious and better paid sections of the industry (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:27).

McDowell (2013) argues that the construction of migrant women from the former colonies as first and foremost workers, excluded them from the then prevalent discourse of acceptable femininity that was a crucial part of the British state’s programme of post-war reconstruction. The boundaries of post-war femininity were framed by a discourse that imagined and produced an explicit role for white British women, “that emphasised domesticity and maternity as the key correlates of womanhood” (McDowell 2013:80). It is useful to consider how constructions of race and gender both obscured and, at the same time, produced the whiteness of motherhood. One of the boundaries through which both femininity and race were constructed was through the debate and discussions surrounding certain women’s attempts and desires to combine motherhood and waged work.

On this point, Hazel Carby (1982) draws attention to the presentation of the post-war period by feminists and engages specifically with the work of Elizabeth Wilson (1980). Carby critiques Wilson’s argument that work and marriage in the post-war period were the two alternative images of womanhood, with the wife and mother as one version and the single career girl as the other. Carby draws attention to the fact that, overwhelmingly, the public debate about (white) women’s entry into the workforce was always framed as a question about whether it was good or bad for the family. However as Carby argues “women from Britain’s reserve army of labour in the colonies were recruited into the labour force far beyond any such considerations” (1982:49). She notes that black women, in fact, bridge the

division between the figure of the worker and that of the mother and that, as a result, when judged against dominant post-war discourses of motherhood “black women were seen to fail as mothers precisely because of their position as workers” (Carby 1982:49).

In extending Carby’s argument, it is possible to argue that the construction of post-war motherhood operated to exclude certain women and that it was through the boundaries of class and race that such exclusions were structured. Good mothering was a full-time occupation, one that was to be performed in the domestic sphere. Post-war motherhood required a specific spatiality in which women’s devotion, selflessness and dependence were produced and maintained. When we consider how such constructions intersect with race and class, there are several interlocking elements that emerge. To be excluded and deemed to fail as a mother in the post-war period produced a considerable amount of precarity, specifically through forms of state intervention that deemed certain families to be ‘at risk’ and in need of state intervention. To be excluded from motherhood also produced an exclusion from constructions of womanhood, as the two subjectivities of woman and mother were so interlinked. There is also a connection between the dehumanisation that such exclusions produce and the naturalisation of exploitation and racialised labour relations that consider some women more suited to ‘institutionalised housework’.

Not only were certain women with children excluded from post-war motherhood, but the needs of working mothers were also marginalised. On the question of childcare, “local councils had no understanding of [Black women’s] needs and offered little or no assistance, particularly to those of us who were married to or living with a man” (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:29).

I had to leave the child between 7.30 and 5.30 every day. That meant I didn’t spend much time with him at all... I did try and get him into a council nursery, but they told me I couldn’t have a place because I was married ... They said it was my husband’s responsibility (contributor cited in Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:29).

It is at this particular intersection, between the precarious ‘back-breaking’ work that, while being crucial for economic prosperity, was devalued and

low waged and the emotional and time-consuming work of raising and caring for children, Black women experiences can be read as pre-figurative.

For the majority of Black women, however, it has been night and shift-work which have enabled us to carry out our responsibilities as mothers and breadwinners. Inadequate sleep, exhaustion and ill-health were the price we have had to pay if we wanted to spend time with our children and feed them too — even when we weren't struggling to do it alone (contributor cited in Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:31).

In attempting to unravel how reproductive labour functions under neoliberalism and mapping the various ways in which the feminist demand for the 24-hour nurseries arose, there is something to be recovered in Black women's experiences of work in the post-war period and their struggles against its precarious, low-paid, devalued status; when we consider the current conditions of many working parents, particularly working mothers who face the difficulties of combining work and care and are trapped in low-paid and often low-status work, we find the contemporary conditions of many working mothers in the past experiences of Black women workers. Furthermore, the needs of working women with children are not confined to Black women's experiences, they are also visible in the demands pursued by working-class women who asserted the need for childcare to enable them to be able to work for wages.

Both discourses, whether constructing women as mothers or as workers were concerned, in the first instance, with the interests of the state and nation rather than the needs of women as individual subjects. During the post-war period, women as workers and women as mothers were understood in the most conservative of ways. Riley argues that this strong separation at the level of discourse in the post-war period between mothers (who are assumed to be always be married and always at home) and women (who are assumed to be periodically at work) produces an artificial categorisation. Furthermore she stresses the dangers of such categorisation, in that it asserts 'motherhood' as "a self-evident value and at the same time works directly against any admission of the real needs of women with children" (Riley 1983b:154). In addition, she makes the point that the prevalence of pro-natalist thinking "generated a great deal of language about 'the mother'... it filled bits of the world with sound, while the birth rate crept quietly upwards" (Riley

1983b:151). Similarly, Lewis (Lewis 1992) argues that, as the post-war baby boom gathered pace, fears of a declining birth rate faded and concern and anxiety shifted to the need to 'rebuild' the family with attention focused squarely on the issues of adequate mothering as the surest means to securing future social stability.

#### **7.4 Motherhood as a Full-Time Occupation**

In 1953, Dr. John Bowlby<sup>41</sup> published *Child Care and the Growth of Love*. The book was based on an earlier report, *Maternal Care and Mental Health* that Bowlby wrote under the auspices of the World Health Organization in 1951. The book was highly influential and widely read, the first edition, published in 1953, was reprinted in 1955, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1963 (twice). The second edition was published in 1965 and reprinted in 1966, 1967, 1968, 1970, 1972 (twice), 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1985 and 1987. The book is divided into two parts, with Part I addressing the 'Adverse Effects of Maternal Deprivation' and Part II the 'Prevention of Maternal Deprivation'. In chapter seven, 'The Purpose of the Family', Bowlby reminds the reader "what is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or mother substitute), in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment" (1965:77).

Early on in chapter one Bowlby poses the question "Can I then never leave my child?" (1965:18). To which he answers: "leaving any child of under three years of age is a major operation only to be undertaken for good and sufficient reasons and when undertaken, to be planned with great care"

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<sup>41</sup> Born in 1907, Bowlby gained his medical qualification at University College Hospital, after which he specialised in psychiatry and psychoanalysis. From 1948 to 1972 he was Deputy Director at the Tavistock Clinic and from 1950, Mental Health Consultant to the World Health Organization and in 1972 he was awarded C.B.E. His son, Richard Bowlby, recounts that Bowlby was raised in London in an upper middle-class family, and was the fourth of six children, whose primary caregiver was his nanny (Bowlby and King 2004). In keeping with the British fashion of his class at this time, Bowlby normally only saw his mother for one hour a day after teatime. Somewhat more available in the summer, she, like many other mothers of the upper middle-class considered that too much parental attention and affection would lead to a dangerous 'spoiling' of children. At the age of seven, he was sent to boarding school, again in keeping with the traditions of his social class. He married in 1938 and he and his wife, Ursula Longstaff had four children.

(1965:18). So in effect, while the answer appears to be yes, in the face of such caution it becomes a no. Starting from the assumed and naturalised sexual division of labour in which the father is the main breadwinner and the mother the full-time mother/housewife, Bowlby argues that maternal care in infancy is as important for mental health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health. In keeping with previous thinking on the matter, notably the theories of Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott, Bowlby assigns the father to a remote and instrumental sphere.

The book is credited with creating the phenomena known as 'Bowlbyism', synonymous in the post-war period with the promotion of the centrality of the mother-child relationship and with "keeping mothers in the home" (Riley 1983b:100). Lewis goes as far as to claim that in the post-war years, Bowlby's ideas of continuous mothering "seemed to have achieved the status of essential truth" (1992:22). In addition to Bowlby's insistence on the centrality of the mother-child relationship, his work also "reinforced the view that the two-parent family was the bedrock of a stable society and any deviation should be condemned" (Thane and Evans 2013:85). The post-war period was, as Thane and Evans argue, was an historically unusual time of near-universal marriage, with average marriage ages exceptionally low. However, they make the point that this supposed 'golden age' only lasted until the 1970s when divorce and cohabitation rose dramatically.

The idea of how widely the phenomenon of Bowlbyism extended into the homes of post-war Britain in "this much stereotyped but little understood period" (Thane and Evans 2013:85) has been repeatedly questioned. As Thane and Evans make clear, there is always a space between private deviation and public norms. To the extent that Bowlbyism was embraced and adopted by post-war mothers, for single mothers and working mothers there was a limit to how far continuous mothering could operate in their daily lives. In another highly influential book published in the same period, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* (1956), authors Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein advocate a model of combining marriage, motherhood and paid employment over the course of a woman's life cycle, with women advised to work up to the birth of their first child and, again, after their children had left school. Their formula expressed both the anxiety of labour-shortages in post-war Britain and the necessity of

encouraging women to have children, while at the same time maintaining that during child-rearing years women should be, continuously, as Bowlby argued, with their children.

The expansion and increased influence of professionalised social work, and of psychology and psychiatry, certainly affected understandings and discourses of motherhood, especially in relation to discourses of children's welfare. Bowlby was not alone in emphasising the mother-child relationship as key to the healthy development of the child with the 'adequacy' of the mother identified as the most important viable (Riley 1983b). Influential psychologists of the time, such as Winnicott, stressed the natural quality of the mother-child relationship. The equation and, indeed, the certainty of knowing you are woman not only through motherhood but also through performing domestic reproductive labour were some of the dominant mechanisms through which intensive full-time motherhood was organised in the post-war period. During one of his wartime radio broadcasts Winnicott evokes the devotion and naturalness of mothering:

Sometimes the urine trickled down your apron or wet right through and soaked you as if you yourself had let slip, and you don't mind. In fact by these things you could have known that you were a woman, and an ordinary devoted mother (Winnicott cited in Lewis 1992:18).

Riley argues that the 1950s was a period in which women who went out to work became shameful and she cites a 1956 feature article in the magazine, *Picture Post* 'Children of Women Who Work', in which the women were millworkers and the children were described as miserable in their factory nursery for long hours. According to the magazine, the mothers were destroying their children's emotional wellbeing for the sake of luxuries: "Is it really necessary in this Welfare State for women to go out to work, or do they do it for the ice cream and the TV?" (cited in Riley 1983:137).

The front cover of the second edition of *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, published in 1965 carries a review quote from *The Times* that reads:

A summary of evidence of the effects upon children of lack of personal attention, and it presents to administrators, social workers, teachers and doctors a reminder of the significance of the family

It remains somewhat unclear as to whether the professionals listed would have needed much reminding of the significance of the family, considering that the period was one in which the family saturated political debates, legal policies and media representations. However, the professional jobs outlined on the book's cover — administrators, social workers, teachers, and doctors — are all professionals who regularly worked with children and particularly children in care. Riley's extensive research into the rise and 'popularisation' of psychoanalysis in the post-war period draws a correlation between Bowlby's 1951 WHO report recommendations of preventing "mental ill-health, through the reforms of [care] institutions, encouraging fostering, treating children in residential homes in small groups" (Riley 1983b:99) and the recommendations advanced by the *Curtis Report* (1948) that focused on children in care. Many of the recommendations of the *Curtis Report* formed the basis of the *Children's Act* (1948). Riley argues that one of the underlying aims of the Act was keeping families together and was a significant component in the post-war rehabilitation of the family.

Another way of reading the book's cover and the need to remind people about the significance of the family is that it exposes a generalised fragility of the family as an institution. The instability of the family was certainly gaining momentum during the mid 1960s and corresponds to the date of printing of the second edition of the book. In particular, the significance of the family and, specifically, the desire for stable families animated much of the public and parliamentary debate that surrounded the establishing of the Royal Commission on Divorce, chaired by Lord Morton in 1951. The Commission was established with a wide remit to investigate not only divorce, but also preparation for marriage, marriage saving and matrimonial proceedings (Smart 1999). The Commission handed down their recommendations in 1956 insisting that there should be no change to divorce law and, hence, retaining fault as the basis of divorce, with fault defined as adultery, cruelty or desertion of three years. By retaining fault as the only grounds for divorce, the Commission was clear in its reaffirmation that marriage was a contract between spouses and the state, and marriage continued, at least at the level of governance, to be an institution rather than a relationship (Smart 1999). However the debate about marriage and the basis for divorce did not go away



and in 1967 the then Labour Government passed the *Divorce Reform Act* (1967) that provided for 'no-fault' divorce.

The discourse of the family in *Child Care and the Growth of Love* differs considerably from the concerns of the immediate post-war years, which had focused on the urgent need to reconstruct and rehabilitate the family, to increase the birth rate and make motherhood more attractive. These concerns certainly appeared prominently in the Beveridge Report and the Royal Commission on Population, however they don't emerge in Bowlby's work in the same way. For Bowlby, it is not the family *per se* that needs to be reconstructed but, instead, a particular type of family structure that needs to be secured as the norm. Bowlby expresses concern about specific aspects and functioning of the family such as 'illegitimacy' and 'problem families' and provides corrective measures to guard against "family breakdown and failure" (Bowlby 1965:99). His insistence of the married two-parent family and the benefits of maternal care — constructed through an intense concentration on the married mother being permanently in the home with the child — operates to produce the norm in which forms of deviation could be policed and disciplined. The conceptualisation of the mother-child dyad as both unique and as the only adequate guarantee of a child's psychic health produced, on the one hand, tremendous guilt, suffocation and isolation for many post-war mothers and, on the other hand, marginalised and obscured the experiences and needs of working mothers— many of them 'unsupported' mothers (Thane and Evans 2013).

## **7.5 Challenging Bowlbyism**

Many in the Women's Liberation Movement criticised and questioned Bowlby's research methods and analysis, highlighting that the book's findings were based on a report that was a study of institutionalised children and then extrapolated to a generalised theory of care for all children. Feminists raised serious concerns that his theories had led to "instilling guilt and suffocation in a generation of mothers" (Riley 1983b:100) and that he denied the independent life of the mother with his exclusive stress on maternal care without taking seriously the question of alternative forms of childcare. In

*Working Mothers and Their Children* (1963) Yudkin and Holme argue that “there can be little doubt that among the major contributing factors to the general disapproval which our society extends to mothers of young children who work outside the home, and the corresponding guilt of the mothers themselves, are the theses of Dr. John Bowlby” (cited in Comer 1972:29).

The feminist criticism and critique of ‘Bowlbyism’ grew during the 1960s and 1970s. Decades that also saw important shifts in behaviour and attitudes, though scholars have questioned the extent of the legendary ‘sexual permissiveness’ of the 1960s, especially within the context of often underestimated shifts in preceding decades (Thane and Evans 2013). However, there were demonstrable changes during the 1960s and 1970s that reconfigured the specific elements of post-war motherhood. The proportion of extramarital births rose, as did the divorce rate even before the change in law came into effect in 1969. After 1969 divorce rates dramatically increased, rising from 37,657 petitions for divorce in 1961-5 to 162,481 in 1976-80 (Thane and Evans 2013:120). From the early 1960s, contraception was more easily available, however it was neither free of charge nor available to unmarried women<sup>42</sup> until the *Family Planning Act* (1967) (Thane and Evans 2013:120).

It was clear to many involved in the Women's Liberation Movement that “the division of labour and the myth of motherhood together confirm women in their domestic identity and tie them to home and family” (Comer 1972:3). In *The Motherhood Myth*, Lee Comer argues that:

[m]otherhood is society's golden carrot...because of this one central assumption which underlies everything that pertains to women, that a woman's true purpose in life and the pinnacle of her fulfilment is motherhood. Thus we arrive at this supposedly self-evident truth; a child needs its mother and, by implication a mother needs her child (Comer 1972:28).

There is, however, a need for a nuanced and careful critique of Bowlbyism, one that remains attentive to how it was that the organisation of motherhood came to be structured in the ways that it was and accepted by so many

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<sup>42</sup> Thane and Evans highlight the shift in state and voluntary sector policies concerning the availability of contraception and to which women it was made available. In 1968 the Family Planning Association allowed its branches, for the first time, to provide contraception to unmarried women and from 1970 required them to do so.

women. The Birmingham Feminist History Group (1979), agree with many of the feminist criticisms of Bowlby's work, however they caution against viewing his theories of childcare as foisted upon unwilling, dumb or naïve women (1979:56). They stress that there was much in the construction of intensive mothering that appealed to women in the 1950s, one of the attractions being undoubtedly the status that it gives women as mothers; "their femininity carries with it special kinds of knowledge and love which are essential to the well being of the child" (1979:56). From this perspective, it is possible to posit that some of the more positive elements of Bowlbyism were the status that was afforded to mothers as vital members of the community as well as the emerging insistence on the importance of the child's emotional as well as physical well-being and the rights of the child.

Contrary to much of the antipathy towards motherhood and being a housewife expressed by feminists in the 1970s, the widespread acceptance of Bowlbyism suggested the possibility of there being some positive aspects to the role of the full-time housewife and mother, elements that are in tension with, indeed are in conflict with, many of the day-to-day experiences of post-war motherhood that were routinely expressed as drudgery, guilt, isolation and boredom. This duality suggests that there is a number of competing discourses that shape motherhood, as well as a number of conflicts involved in the organisation of the reproductive sphere. In the first instance it suggests that there is a need to recognise a deep diversity in mothering practices. A diversity in the experiences and practices of mothering becomes apparent when the experiences of working-class women and women of colour are considered alongside the dominant discourses of motherhood that reflect white middle-class women's concerns (Collins 1994).

This duality also suggests a second instance, connected in part to the first, that makes visible the conceptualisation of reproduction as structured by a dual characteristic (Federici 2012). On the one hand, reproduction produces and reproduces not only the commodity labour-power, but also the mother as the female unwaged reproductive worker of capital. But at the same time, reproduction produces and reproduces human life, sustains communities and identities and creates the possibility for resistance. It is useful to return to the definition of the dual characteristic of reproducing labour as outlined by

Federici. She explains “to the extent that labor power can only exist in the living individual, its reproduction must be simultaneously a production and valorization of desired human qualities and capacities, and an accommodation to the externally imposed standards of the labor market” (2012:99). That these two characteristics exist in contradiction to one another reveals the “unstable, potentially disruptive character” (Federici 2012:99) of reproductive work that manifests in the struggles and conflicts waged by women and plays out in various discourses that organise motherhood. The political significance of the dual character of reproductive work is that “it tells us that we can struggle against housework without having to fear that we will ruin our communities, for this work imprisons the producers as well as those reproduced by it” (Federici 2012:100). Furthermore, the forcefulness of the feminist critique that emerged in the 1970s Women’s Liberation Movement can be read as encompassing both a positive revolt against reproduction from a position of relative power, as well as being waged against the gendered repression and exploitation present in the family home.

## **7.6 Oral Histories and the Archives: Encounter #6**

My first encounter with the Women’s Library was standing outside the main entrance, holding a banner with a group of sex workers in 2006. We were protesting about an exhibition at the library that focused on the history of prostitution but that had failed to include the voices of sex workers or any materials from the sex worker rights movement. My second encounter with the Women’s Library was in 2013 when I helped to organise an occupation of the library as part of a feminist campaign to try and save the library from being moved from its purpose-built building in East London and sold off. My third encounter with the Women’s Library was on the fourth floor of the LSE Library where its collections are now housed. It was during this third encounter that I accessed the extensive collections pertaining to the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.

As I made my way through the folders of materials– materials that had in the main, been donated by prominent activists of Women’s Liberation Movement or feminist organisations – my initial response was of familiarity, borne from my experiences of left-wing activism and, specifically, from my involvement in feminist movements. It was a familiarity with the processes and practices that occur within such spaces: taking minutes, writing up reports of conference workshops, making leaflets about upcoming demos, organising workshops, taking an attendance list of participants at meetings and writing critiques. I had done all of these things, hundreds of times. At the time, I remember thinking that the act of collecting and keeping such materials, which would hardly have been thought of as destined for an archive at the time of their production, must have taken a specific feminist subject. The note in my research diary reads: “They must have known they were creating history, why else keep all the bits of paper. Who gets to create history?”

These initial questions that emerged from the archive took a backseat as I spent months reading, photographing, transcribing and analysing the materials. These materials added to the documents that I had already copied from the personal files of feminist activists in Brisbane and also New York. However, my initial questions of whose documents make it into the archives eventually resurfaced when it became obvious, painfully so, that the organisation of the materials in the Women’s Library pertaining to the Women’s Liberation Movement were overwhelmingly produced by and reflected the experiences of white women, many of them middle-class. In a moment of confusion, and a sort of disappointment, I wondered how my research had ended up reproducing one of the main points of criticism levelled at the women’s movement: a vision of feminism and, by extension, womanhood that excludes and marginalises the experiences of women of colour and working-class women. It is a critique I know well and one that I have no interest in perpetuating.

Of course it didn't take long to track down different archives, collections of other documents, of other struggles in different neighbourhoods. The Black Cultural Archives in Brixton houses the personal documents of some of the women who were active in the Black Women's Movement that emerged in the 1970s, as well as an oral history project, *The Heart of the Race: Oral Histories of the Black Women's Movement* that documents the activism of Black women in the UK. It is worth considering the spatial organisation of two collections: separate archives reflect and also remind us of the considerable conflicts and separation rooted in constructions of whiteness and racism that produced multiple women's movements.

### 7.7 Silences: The Said and the Unsaid

As Foucault (1984) reminds us, to develop a genealogical analysis is to pay attention to both the said and the unsaid. One of the loud silences, not only in *Power of Women and Subversion of the Community* (1972), but more generally in the Women's Liberation Movement's analysis of women's role in the home, is the absence of any detailed attention and discussion of women's paid domestic work as cleaners, servants and chars<sup>43</sup>. In paying attention to, indeed listening to, the unsaid, the intention is not to posit this silence as an omission or error. Instead, the silence is useful in examining the history of domestic service in Britain and also the formation of class and race relations in the post-war period.

The discussion of domestic work in the *Power of Women and Subversion of the Community* starts from the assumption that not only is reproductive work gendered as women's work, but it is also unwaged. The waged work of women working in households performing domestic and care work is not

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<sup>43</sup> A charwoman or char is a woman employed to clean houses or offices. The word has the same roots the late 16<sup>th</sup> century 'chore woman', one hired to do odd chores around the house. 'Charwoman' appeared as an occupation in the English census of 1841 but it fell out of common use in the later decades of the 20th century, often replaced by the term 'daily (woman)'. Unlike maid or housekeeper, which were typically live-in positions, the charwoman usually worked for hourly wages, usually on a part-time basis and often having several different employers.

discussed nor presented as relevant to understanding the “Woman Question”. There are, of course, many silences in the text, however this one is significant; had the text been written 50 years earlier, in say 1922 instead of 1972, it would have been nearly inconceivable to have omitted the significant number of working-class women, many of them Irish women who worked as domestics and servants from a feminist analysis of the domestic sphere.

From one point of view, the omission suggests that the domestic sphere disappeared in the post-war period. However, the disappearance of domestic service after the Second World War that the silence indicates in fact never happened. Selina Todd (2009) argues that the history of domestic service is one of development, rather than decline, with the live-in housemaid of the 1900s replaced with the part-time cleaner of the 1950s. This change from residential to part-time service, Todd argues has a primarily economic explanation. In the previous period, from 1900–1950, domestic service defined a formative stage of many working-class women’s lives. These young women tended to be unmarried and most left service once they got married. Domestic service was the largest occupation for young women, to the extent that in 1901 “one in three women in paid employment worked as a servant, and roughly one in four during the inter-war years” (Todd 2009:183). Due to the depression and widespread poverty, the number of servants in 1931 reached 1,554,235 (Todd 2009:185). Residential service declined during the 1940s and the Second World War marked the end of residential domestic service as the major employer of young women. But as Todd’s research shows the maids of the 1920s and 1930s returned as chars and cleaners in the 1950s and 1960s.

It is interesting to consider that, overwhelmingly, the 1970s feminist analysis of the 'Woman Question' was produced by women who reflected on their own situation and also perhaps that of their mothers. In essence, they were looking back from the late 1960s and 1970s, through the post-war period of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. Overwhelmingly, the young white women who took part in the Women’s Liberation Movement were the children of the post-war Britain baby boom, though, of course, there were a number of exceptions to this generalisation<sup>44</sup>; they produced an analysis of the full-time

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<sup>44</sup> Overwhelmingly, the feminist activists who were active in the 1960s and 1970s and who are cited throughout

housewife, motherhood and the family that belonged overwhelmingly to the post-war period. This was a period in which not only were there relatively lower levels of female employment outside the home, but, for the first time in over 100 years, the waged domestic work of servants was not the dominant occupation for working-class women. Disrupting the discourse that claims that after the Second World War women willingly went 'back to the kitchen' is the fact that women's employment increased throughout the 1950s and 1960s, albeit at a slower rate than in the 1970s and 1980s. The tension embodied in this moment is that despite increases in women's waged employment, traditional gendered divisions of home and work were restored and in many ways strengthened in reaction to the disruption to family life and experiences of mass female employment during the wartime years (Riley 1983b).

The Black feminist scholar Angela Davis', criticism of the demands of Wages for Housework specifically "that women of colour and especially Black women have been receiving wages for housework for untold decades" (Davis 1983:237) is a reminder that the histories of domestic work are structured and located differently in urban, as opposed to rural, areas and across different national and geographical areas. Specifically the histories of slavery and colonialism in the United States shaped waged domestic work in different ways than they did in Britain. Of course, slavery and colonialism shaped Britain and, specifically, shaped the development of the domestic sphere, however Britain's long and extremely profitable involvement with slavery was largely an offshore phenomenon (McDowell 2013:96).

What then to make of the decline of live-in domestic servants and, equally, the reconfiguration of waged domestic work into part-time employment? The silence in the discourse suggests both a transformation to the organisation of the labour of reproduction that occurred in the post-war period and also reveals the strategic function of domestic work in an older moment of history. The reconfiguration of domestic service in the post-war period is interesting in that waged domestic work, often referred to as 'service', had played a

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this thesis most were born in the 1940s and 1950s, however, Selma James was born in 1930 and Margret Benston and Maria Mies were both born in 1931



central and defining role in the relations between women of different social classes during the emergence of capitalism and continued to do so up until the 1940s. Davidoff and Hall's (1987) argument concerning the emergence of the domestic sphere as separate from the public sphere and the prevailing domestic ideology of the Victorian era, was that such separations were only made possible by the labour of domestic servants. McClintock develops the argument further with the claim that the domestic servant became the embodiment of a central contradiction within modern industrial capitalism, in so far as "the separation of the private from the public was achieved only by paying working-class women for domestic work that wives were supposed to perform for free" (1995:164). The arrangement of defining reproductive activities as 'women's work' combined with women's 'proper place' being the domestic sphere occurred alongside the devaluing and naturalising of reproductive activities and tasks, to such an extent that the labour of reproduction was reduced to a status of non-work that belonged morally and economically to women.

The complex, uneven and contradictory ways in which women from different classes experienced the domestic sphere in the Victorian era is evident in the continued necessity of large numbers of working-class women to work for wages to ensure their own survival and also to contribute to working-class household budgets (Lewis 1986). While the middling classes of Victorian England may have longed for a gendered world where women were 'Angels in the House' and the hallmark of middle-class respectability dictating "that wives did not involve themselves in paid work" (Dyhouse 1986:28), it must be recognised that few working-class households could have afforded such arrangements.

However, there is a further moment of complexity contained within the history of domestic service, one that involves the relationship of domestic work to early feminist movements, specifically, the women's suffrage movement that animated political life in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Extending Todd's argument that domestic service is "fundamental to the modern history of work" (Todd 2009:183) is the point that domestic work is fundamental to the history of feminist movements (Schwartz 2015). The disproportionate prevalence of middle- and upper-class women within 'first-

wave' feminism was made possible by the uneven relationship that women of different social classes had with respect to waged work in general, and domestic work in particular. This emphasises not only the centrality of servants to class formation in England but also the centrality of domestic work to the formation of both 'first-' and 'second-wave' feminist movements. In first-wave feminism the organisation of waged domestic labour was key, and, conversely, in second-wave feminism unwaged domestic labour played a central role in feminist theory and political action.

As such, the reconfiguration at the end of the Second World War of domestic reproductive work signalled an unravelling of one of the central contradictions of early modern industrial capitalism. The reconfiguration of the gendered organisation of the labour processes of the mistress and her servants was, in part, resolved through the reaffirmation and consolidation of the full-time nature of motherhood and unwaged housework in the 1950s. Furthermore, I would argue that the partial unravelling of one of the key contradictions of early industrial capitalism was made possible by the extension of the family wage to unprecedented numbers of working-class households and the formation of the British welfare state.

For middle-class women in the post-war period— women who had been the main beneficiaries of previous organisation of domestic service and the labour of servants— it was actually harder to combine a career and a family after the war. Many middle-class women found themselves, for the first time, running and cleaning their households unaided (McDowell 2013). This contraction of possibilities has been conceptualised as representing a growing proletarianisation of women in the post-war welfare state (Wilson 1977) in so far as women's lived everyday experiences of the domestic sphere became less demarcated. Anne Phillips (1987) argues that, as the class differences in domestic arrangements that had so sharply divided women into employers (mistresses) and employees (servants and maids) before the war became relatively less significant, some women began to recognise common interests based on their gender. This is a shift that, she argues, prefigured the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in the mid- and late 1960s.

As such, the silence in the text concerning waged domestic work— a silence that reflects a more generalised silence within 1970s feminist discourses of the

home and reproduction— can be argued to represent a relatively brief historical moment. One way to read the silence is that it speaks to the overwhelming concentration of women's work and subjectivity being forged in and through the domestic terrain and organised via the figure of the full-time mother/housewife in the post-war period. The full-time mother/housewife was a subjectivity that was made possible by the creation of the welfare state and the extension of the family wage system. Within post-war motherhood, two different historical subjectivities are brought together, that of the 'non-working' middle-class housewife and that of the working-class domestic servant. The force of the feminist critique of women's role within the domestic sphere that emerged in the 1970s can, therefore, be usefully understood to encompass a meeting point of these two subjectivities, as well as the refusal of the terms of domestic labour under capitalism. Another aspect of the silence is that the post-war period was not only a brief moment but also one that produced the possibility for women in the 1970s to speak of a gender in common and, also, to forcefully name their labour and activity in the domestic sphere as work that produced value and was commensurable to waged labour outside the home.

In the next chapter, the question of value production and the reproduction of labour-power are further extended to include production and reproduction under conditions of slavery and during the Transatlantic slave trade. As such, the following chapter continues to examine the question of reproductive labour, however the focus of analysis shifts to include not only Britain, but also the experiences of female slaves on the plantations in the British colonies. The analysis connects the processes of naturalisation of motherhood and reproduction that were produced in industrial Britain with the dehumanisation and vast accumulation of wealth in the colonies that are central to African women's experiences of "back-breaking labour in the service of European capitalism" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:17).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Another way home: Slavery, Motherhood and Resistance

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#### 8.1 Breeding, Part 1: Encounter # 7

Four of us were in a car on our way to a radical student conference, it was the very late 1990s and the WTO protests in Seattle had just hit the national papers. We had driven straight through from Brisbane to Sydney, a nine-hour drive with your foot flat to the floor. We arrived sweaty, tired and sort of tumbled out of the car and into the front garden of a huge run-down student house in inner Sydney. A woman I had not met before, Natasha, was at the front door. Noting my then boyfriend, she spat, "So, you're a breeder then".

Standing there in the harsh morning sunshine, the word breeder did the job it was intended to do: producing a connection between my 19 year-old body, it's assumed capacity for biological reproduction, patriarchy and normative heterosexual sex. A little taken back, I mumbled something in response while looking at my feet and spent the rest of the week thinking about what breeder sex would be like.

In *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici explores the historical processes that reconfigured the female body "into an instrument for the reproduction of labor and the expansion of the work-force, treated as a natural breeding-machine, functioning according to rhythms outside of women's control" (2004:91). This reconfiguration of women into breeders is a story that, as Hortense Spillers (1987) reminds us cannot be deciphered without tripping

over other female narratives. It is a history that asks us to consider how the reproduction of labor-power is valued, what it costs and who pays the bill. The encounter that opens this chapter begins with the profoundly racist and sexist concept of breeding as a departure point in which to unravel some of the interconnections between slavery, motherhood and reproduction. Through an investigation of how the concept of breeding was constructed in relation to slave women, the chapter maps some of the technologies of reproduction under slavery and the construction and organisation of gender, race and class relations inside and outside of waged labour. The intersection of race, gender and class relations can be usefully understood as “articulated categories” (McClintock 1995:5) that come into existence in and through their relation to each other — if in contradictory and contested ways.

In the following chapter, the construction of motherhood is considered in relation to the reorganisation of reproduction in Britain as a result of the emergence of capitalist production alongside the histories of slavery and colonialism. In returning to the histories of slavery and British colonialism this chapter connects to the previous discussion about post-war migration from the former colonial world. There are obvious limitations to the analysis in this chapter, in part borne from the focus on the Transatlantic slave trade and Britain. Of course not only were there other imperial powers involved in the Transatlantic slave trade but also many other territories from which the British Empire accumulated vast amounts of wealth and labour. In future research it would be useful to bring together the histories of slavery and industrial capitalism with that of the wealth and labour violently ripped out of Asia via the multiple technologies of indentured labour, starvation, war and colonialism. In doing so it would also be possible to highlight the connections, as well as the differences in the post-war migration experiences of motherhood, the domestic sphere and waged labour of women from South Asia.

The inequalities and disparities in how different racialised and gendered subjects experience the labour of making and remaking people under capitalism cannot be ignored and these gaps, silences and spaces of difference have long and complex histories. In paying attention to these gaps and spaces of distance, one site that emerges is the highly contradictory nature of the

home and the family under slavery. Moreover, in some instances the slave household and domestic labour functioned as important sites of resistance for slave communities and slave women in particular. Exploring the complexities of the domestic lives and family structures under slavery challenges tendencies within feminist theory that assume a universal or 'shared' experience of home, motherhood and the domestic sphere. If the home is not essentially repressive, the question becomes how some homes can be sites of significant resistance while others are sites of domination. This opens up a pragmatic and operative conceptualisation of the home as site of domination/resistance. Furthermore, where social structures block the establishment of patriarchal masculinity, there is the potential for the home to mean something else.

In beginning with breeding, this chapter explores how "in a situation where labour was plentiful, it was considered more profitable to work slaves to death than to provide the basic human requirements which would have prolonged [their] working lives" (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:18). The first section of this chapter investigates how it was more profitable to buy humans than it was for them, to use the language of the slave owners, to breed. This moment of calculation, one that is grotesque in its measurement is revealing in so far as it highlights the significant costs associated with reproduction. Connected to the enslavement and exploitation of African slaves in the colonies, is the history of how the making and remaking of labour-power in Britain was reconfigured to be a white woman's 'natural' and 'proper' role. Labour that was stripped of value, narrowed in meaning and confined to the domestic sphere. Framing this in another way, I would argue that the construction and function of motherhood and women's naturalised domestic role in Britain relied on the exclusion and disciplining of certain bodies, specifically those of women of colour and working mothers.

An investigation into these technologies of reproduction makes it painfully clear that it is necessary for a feminist politics of reproduction to pay attention to the constructions and experiences of race and class alongside that of gender. In doing so, such a politics demands that we abandon the claim to a universalised motherhood and the domestic sphere as an always-already degraded terrain of oppression and domination. The desires of some women,

overwhelmingly white middle-class educated women, to escape the home and strive for equality in the world of employment has certainly dominated the story of reproduction in the last 40 years. However, this desire of escape from domesticity and for a certain notion of freedom has obscured other narratives of the domestic sphere and motherhood, as well as concealing on both a local and global scale the layers of dependency that are involved in the making and remaking of people and workers under capitalism.

## **8.2 Dependencies**

When we articulate reproduction as a problematic, specifically as a political problem connected to the histories of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonialism and the development of industrial capitalism in Europe and particularly Britain, it becomes possible to grasp how certain activities and bodies became sexually and racially differentiated. In the case of reproductive activities, they were not only differentiated but also devalued and, in many instances, made invisible through an evocation of the natural. These structures of difference that can articulated as violent separations can usefully be contextualised as occurring alongside the enclosure of the commons and mechanisms of accumulation that connected the emergence of industrial capitalism in Britain with the colonial project that relied on the enslavement of African workers. The framing of history in such a way reveals how essential and central slavery has been for capitalism. Massimo De Angelis argues that tracing such connections reveals characteristics and dynamics quite different from the stereotypical representation portraying the passage from 'feudalism' to 'capitalism' in Europe and posits that an analysis of "primitive accumulation is consistent with an understanding of the capitalist economy as a world economy"(De Angelis 2001:11).

The vast concentrations of wealth, resources and capital that flowed into Europe and, specifically, England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has led many scholars to conclude that the plantation production system and trade in African labour played a fundamental role in the emergence of capitalism, industrial production and the expansion of colonialism and settlement. Taking this argument further in *Black Marxism* (2000), Cedric

Robinson presents the histories of race and racialism as existing prior to the emergence of capitalism and demonstrates the necessarily racist character of capitalism as an expression of European civilization. He cautions against a narration of the history of capitalism that defines slavery and slave labour as processes of primitive accumulation relegated to an historical stage somewhere between feudalism and capitalism. He argues that “slave labor, the slave trade and their associated phenomena ... profoundly altered the economies of those states directly or indirectly involved in colonization and production by slave labor” (Robinson 2000:81). To stress the point, Robinson describes the ‘associated phenomena’ of slavery as including “markets for cheap commodities; ship building and outfitting; mercantile and military navies; cartography; forestry; banking; insurance; technological improvements in communication, industrial production” (2000:81).

The extreme violence and brutality of the slave trade is often washed away in the tales of capitalism’s birth and the scale and depth of connection between the geographies of the British Empire rarely gets acknowledged; to do so would give voice to uncomfortable questions of how some people came to possess the wealth they have and why others remain dispossessed and trapped in so-called cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Eric Williams explains that the specific role England played in the “triangular trade” between Europe, the New World and Africa as one in which “by 1750 there was hardly a trading or a manufacturing town in England which was not in some way connected with the triangular or direct colonial trade. The profits obtained provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution” (1966:52).

The centrality of slavery to the emergence of capitalism was one that transformed not only the landscape of the colonies, but also Britain. The immense accumulation of labour and capital that was made possible through the enslavement, forced labour and death of millions of African workers on the slave ships, plantations and colonies produced some of the economic and social conditions that enabled the separation of production from reproduction in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Britain. In this instance to speak of the separation of production from reproduction is to articulate the processes that ensured workers’ dependence on the wage and their inability



to reproduce themselves independently of capitalism. The significant reduction in the costs associated with reproducing labour-power (i.e. workers) in Britain that was made possible through the production of cheap commodities using slave labour in the colonies, prefigured capitalism's contemporary use of 'cheap' migrant labour and the production of consumer commodities in the so-called Third World (Federici 2004).

The production of commodities such as sugar, rum, tea, tobacco and cotton — the most important commodities (apart from bread) in the making and remaking of workers in Europe did not reach large-scale production in the colonies until slavery has been institutionalized after the 1650s. Before production was transformed with African slave labour, the "luxury" items stolen, looted or traded from the colonies were consumed by the privileged European elite who could afford them (Mies 1998). However, once production in the colonies was expanded through the use of slave labour, one direct consequence was a reduction in the costs of the commodity basket necessary to reproduce labour-power during the emergence of industrial capitalism in Britain. In other words, one of the connections established through the slave trade was between the profitability of production in the colonies and the reduction in costs associated with keeping workers alive and fed in the industrial metropolis. As Federici argues, the expansion of colonial commodity production and the use of slave labour restructured the reproduction of industrial workers and, conversely, the costs associated with reproducing labour-power on an international scale and "the metropolitan wage became the vehicle by which the goods produced by enslaved workers went to market, and the value of the products of enslaved-labor were realized" (2004:104).

The emergence of industrial capitalism in Britain was an uneven, contested and violent series of interlocking events. The accumulation of labour and capital that slavery made possible assisted in forging the 'free' labourers of Britain — workers who were and often remain free to starve without the wage. The 'freedom' of capital's industrial workers was, following Marx's analysis, a double freedom. A freedom that enabled specific class and gender relations, that while being uneven and continually contested, separated men and women in Britain into distinct spheres of work and influence, specifically,

(male) waged productive work in the factory/public sphere and (female) unwaged reproductive work in the home/domestic realm.

### **8.3 Separations**

The centrality of slavery to the development of capitalism in Britain cannot however be argued to have only existed within the realm of the economic. In addition to the immense monetary wealth that slavery produced for Britain it is also useful to add the techniques of discipline, policing and control of labour exported from the colonies back to England and into the factory system (Federici 2004:104). Equally, power does not flow in only one direction and there were significant lessons and experiences that the colonialists and slaveholders learnt from the sustained slave revolts and resistance against conditions of captivity (James 1989). In relation to the argument being explored in this chapter concerning the connections between slavery and reproduction, it is useful to consider the centrality of slavery to constructions of gender relations. bell hooks contends that “the shift away from the image of white women as sinful and sexual to that of white women as virtuous lady occurred at the same time as mass sexual exploitation of enslaved black women” (1981:32).

The Transatlantic slave trade and slave economy was one in which slaves were defined as chattel and this definition of people as ‘profitable labour-units’ or as property to be bought and sold applied to women as much as it did to men. Angela Davis argues slaves “might as well have been genderless as far as the slaveholders were concerned” (1983:5). On the defeminisation of women slaves, the fugitive slave Williamson Pease said, “Women who do outdoor work are used as bad as men” (cited in White 1985:120).

Bonded women cut down trees to clear lands for cultivation. They hauled logs by leather straps attached to their shoulders. They plowed using mule and ox teams and hoed, sometimes with the heaviest implements available. They dug ditches, spread manure fertiliser and piled coarse fodder with their bare hands. They built and cleaned Southern roads, helped to construct Southern railroads, and of course, they picked cotton (White 1985:120).

Hortense Spillers makes the point that “under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and male body become a territory of cultural and political manoeuvre, not at all gender-related, gender specific” (Spillers 1987:67, emphasis in the original). This loss of gender difference is evident in the conditions of labour of fieldworkers that (the majority of) slaves experienced, in that girls and women were

assigned to work the soil, pick the cotton, cut the cane, harvest the tobacco... [and] ...that judged by the evolving nineteenth-century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women’s roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, Black women were practically anomalies (Davis 1983:5-6).

Despite the equality of exploitation that slave women experienced in the conditions of their work, they also suffered in different and gendered ways in so far as they were victims of sexual abuse, rape and other violence that is preserved for and inflicted upon the bodies of women. Furthermore, by analysing the labour conditions of (female) slaves involved in production and the differentiated ways that (white) women in Britain came to be seen as inhabitants of a sphere that was separated from the realm of productive work and synonymous with ‘mother’ and ‘housewife’, it is important to note that “among Black slaves, this vocabulary was nowhere to be found” (Davis 1983:12). Davis argues that the gendered role assigned to female slaves was one in which they were conceived of “as ‘breeders’ — animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers ..[and] since slave women were classified as ‘breeders’ as opposed to ‘mothers’, their infant children could be sold” (1983:7).

In sharp contrast to the emerging Victorian ideology that attempted to naturalise, feminise and, crucially, privatise the processes of reproduction of ‘industrial’ workers in Britain, the explicit understanding of the costs and work of reproducing the slave population is revealed by the calculations that the slave traders and planters undertook. The cost of reproduction was so considerable that a slave born on the plantation cost substantially more, confirming that during the operation of the international slave trade it was ‘cheaper’ to purchase than to breed (Mies 1998:91). Consideration of the time during and after pregnancy, the need for better and more food and,

importantly, the loss of work hours which would have been necessary so as to be able to care for the child all informed plantation owners' calculations. The considerable differences in how reproduction was constructed and valued are stark. In the colonies with regard to slaves there was visible and measurable monetary value associated with the activities of reproduction, in comparison to the naturalised and devalued processes of reproduction that were emerging in industrial Britain.

It must be stressed that the emergence of a discourse of separate spheres that constituted a "domestic ideology" (Davidoff and Hall 1987) in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain was an uneven process, constantly being broken apart at the same time as it was being constructed. While the process was continually being contested, a variety of changes and transformations occurred over time that enabled women and men to be conceived of as existing in separate spheres and their work gendered and valued or devalued accordingly. Drawing together the twin processes of the emergence of the trade in slaves and the subjugation of women, Federici argues "starting in the mid-16th century, while Portuguese ships were returning from Africa with their first human cargoes, all the European governments began to impose the severest penalties against contraception, abortion and infanticide" (2004:88).

In her analysis of the historical dynamics and processes that led to the devaluation of women's reproductive labour, Federici stresses the importance of the witch trials, the criminalisation of women's control over procreation and the degradation of maternity to a relative and literal position of forced labour. However, like many other feminist scholars, Federici also characterises the dynamic that was gaining momentum in eighteenth century as one that assigned men and women to separate spheres of influence and work and one that particularly designated women to the domestic sphere and privatised family structure. Federici argues that the historic changes in the social location and power of women "that peaked in the 19th century with the creation of the full-time housewife — redefined women's position in society and in relation to men" (2004:75).

It was within the emergent middle-class that the family and the household were first defined as separate from the sphere of production. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1987) argue that the construction of women's

naturalised domestic role within the family was key to the bourgeois assertion of cultural authority and political power, enabling the middling classes to relocate the idea of virtue, honour and morality away from the inherited form of aristocratic noblesse oblige, into the domestic sphere. As guardians of morality, middle-class women were also the bearers of bourgeois cultural hegemony and Davidoff and Hall demonstrate that middle-class women themselves played an active role in the production of domestic ideology, just as their domestic labour made a vital contribution to middle-class economic production. Not only did middle-class women, along with the enormous amounts of work of their female servants, perform the reproductive labour upon which all the now differentiated 'productive' labour of men depended, but as consumers of an ever-increasing range of household commodities — soft furnishings, ornaments, cleaning products — they were also central in shaping new forms of commodity capitalism and colonial economies, while actively creating a new middle-class identity (Davidoff 1976:33-34).

It is within this context that McClintock (1995) argues that imperialism and colonialism were not something that happened elsewhere nor can they be conceived of as an uncomfortable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather imperialism and the invention of race were "fundamental aspects of Western, industry modernity [that] became central not only to the self-definition of the middle-class but also to the policing of the 'dangerous classes': the working-class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd" (1995:5). She makes a similar claim with respect to the cult of domesticity as neither simply trivial nor belonging only to the private, 'natural' realm of the family. For McClintock the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed dimension of male, as well as female identities, and an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise (1995:5).

The domesticated family structure that came to dominate middle-class homes mediated between the public and private spheres and, importantly, connected the emerging market with the domestic sphere. Davidoff and Hall's analysis of gender subjectivities of middle-class men and women highlights the class and gender formations that both constructed, and were constructed by, the creation of the domestic sphere. In particular, their work draws attention to

the role of the middle-class home; a space that can be said to have been built on the expropriation of working-class men and women's labour, whether in the public world of the workplace (factories) or the private workplace of the home, which employed the majority of the female workforce as servants; expropriation that was also made possible by the immense amount of wealth produced by slave labour on the plantations.

Here, the "triangular trade" (Williams 1966) connects the creation of the Victorian domestic sphere as home to millions of working-class servants, middle-class wives and consumption of household commodities to the industrial factories, in which value was produced and labour-power consumed, and the slave plantations that produced the materials that provided cheapened materials to reproduce workers in both the public and private spheres. This interconnected and complex picture of the boundaries that demarcated private from public emphasises the fact that the public was not really public, nor the private really that private. Furthermore, despite the powerful imagery and discourse of the separate spheres of work and home, both the private and public are ideological constructs with specific meanings that are the product of a particular historical time, constantly being contested and under revision (Davidoff and Hall 1987).

Separate spheres reflected, justified and made sense of the reorganisation of society brought about by the development of industrial capitalism. Within middle-class discourses of work, gender and the family, the potent combination and intersection of the constructs of labours of leisure (the housewife) and labours of invisibility (servants) served to further conceal and deny the economic value of women's domestic work (McClintock 1995). The defeminisation of women slaves and the measurable cost of reproduction under slavery effectively excluded female slaves not only from constructions of motherhood but also, more generally, from being imagined as women.

#### **8.4 Labour**

In the British Empire, the relative 'cheapness' of slave labour declined when the trade in slaves was abolished in 1807, prompting plantation owners to adopt a slave breeding policy. Although the trade in slaves was illegalised in

1807, it took another 26 years for the *British Slavery Abolition Act* (1833) to come into force, which formally abolished slavery throughout most of the British Empire. Writing specifically about the histories of slavery in the US, Davis argues that when the abolition of the international slave trade began to threaten the expansion of the young cotton-industry, “the slaveholding class was forced to rely on natural reproduction... [and that]...during the decades preceding the Civil War, Black women came to be increasingly appraised for their fertility (or for the lack of it)” (Davis 1983:6).

The ‘turn’ to a reliance on biological reproduction as compared to the trade and purchase of labour-power for colonial economies has been debated and analyzed by numerous scholars and “much has been made of the slaveholders’ definition of the Black family as a matrilineal structure” (Davis 1983:12). In *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, Herbert Gutman presents evidence of developed and complex family structures that existed during slavery which were not the infamous matriarchal family<sup>45</sup> but rather families involving wife, husband, children and frequently other relatives, as well as adoptive kin (Gutman 1976). Gutman confirms that undeniably slave families were separated and disrupted, however he also argues that slaves adhered to strict norms regulating their familial arrangements.

Patricia Hill Collins further develops Gutman’s argument around slave families and posits that “enslaved Africans were property and one way that many resisted the dehumanising effects of slavery was by re-creating African notions of family as extended kin units” (Collins 2000:55). She argues that this slave community stood in opposition to a White-man controlled public sphere of political economy (2000:55). Connected to modes of resistance against dehumanisation was the relative security that often accompanied motherhood for slave women, where “childbearing was a way for enslaved Black women to anchor themselves in a place for an extended period and maintain

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<sup>45</sup> Gutman’s research was stimulated by the public and academic controversy surrounding Daniel Moynihan’s *Negro Family in America: The Case for National Action* (1965). The ‘Moynihan Report’ identified the problems of Black communities as stemming from “the deterioration of the Negro family” and that a “tangle of pathology resulted; the disorganized “black family” was at its center (Moynihan cited in Gutman 1976:xvii). In reference to the Moynihan Report, Collins writes that “black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminising their daughters and of retarding their children’s academic achievement” (Collins 2000:187).

enduring relationships with husbands, family, and friends” (Collins 2000:58). As such, the relative security of motherhood served to reinforce its importance. Collins also argues that, within the elevated status of motherhood, the refusal of slave women to bear children and cases of Black infanticide can also be read as acts of resistance to the system of slavery and its dependence on the bodies of slave women (2000:58).

Collins outlines the various mechanisms involved in not only calculating the costs of reproduction but also encouraging reproduction such as “assigning pregnant women lighter workloads, giving pregnant women more attention and rations, and rewarding prolific women with bonuses” (Collins 2000:57). Deborah Gray White writes, “slave masters wanted adolescent girls to have children, and to this end they practiced a passive though insidious kind of breeding”(1985:98). Gutman also notes that especially after the abolition of the overseas slave trade a high premium was placed on females who began early to bear children. Of course, slaves and owners measured the birth of a child differently, “the owner viewed the birth of a slave child primarily as an economic fact but the slave viewed the same event primarily as a social and familial fact” (Gutman 1976:75).

It is within the complex conceptualisation of equality in exploitation and enslavement and the valorisation of a limited, yet present, domestic life, that Davis adds another dimension to the story of slavery and gender; Black women “also asserted their equality aggressively in challenging the inhuman institution of slavery” (1983:19). Davis sketches the various practices and acts of resistance that female slaves engaged in and writes that slave women “poisoned their masters, committed other acts of sabotage and like their men, joined maroon communities” (1983:19). Two of the better-known women slaves Sojourner Truth (c.1797–1883) and Harriet Tubman (c.1822–1913) were both born into slavery in the United States and subsequently escaped and lived as ‘free’ women. Both were prominent abolitionist and women’s rights activists. In 1828, Truth won a landmark lawsuit to recover her son Peter who had been illegally sold into slavery in Alabama and become the first black woman in the United States to take a white man to court and win. After escaping in 1849, Tubman was involved in rescuing approximately 70 enslaved friends and family using the network of antislavery activists and



safe houses know as the Underground Railroad (Larson 2004). Yet, not every black woman was a Sojourner Truth or Harriet Tubman, strength as White argues: “Had to be cultivated. It came no more naturally to them than to anyone, slave or free, male or female, black or white. If [slave women] seemed exceptionally strong it was partly because they often functioned in groups and derived strength from numbers” (White 1985:119). Davis also notes that slave women’s resistance was often also subtle and included, for example, the clandestine acquisition of reading and writing skills and the imparting of this knowledge to others.

An analysis of slave families, their social and domestic lives and support structures helps to foreground a crucial and antagonistic space within slavery, a space where slaves performed, according to Davis “the only labor of the slave community which could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor... Domestic labor was the only meaningful labor for the slave community as a whole” (1972:89). She argues that the domestic life of slaves took on an over-determined importance as it provided them with the only space “where they could truly experience themselves as human beings” and “Black women, for this reason — and also because they were workers just like men — were not debased by their domestic functions in the way that white women came to be” (Davis 1983:16-17). According to Davis the special character of domestic labour during slavery, its centrality to both men and women slaves, “involved work that was not exclusively female” (Davis 1983:17). She outlines that, while women cooked and sewed and men did the gardening and hunting, this sexual division of domestic labour was not organised hierarchically: men’s tasks were not superior to the work performed by women and that the division was not always rigorous.

## **8.5 Home**

The argument that the home and the domestic sphere offer a potential space for resistance and renewal is not premised on a claim that draws a neat line from ‘the past’, in this case of slavery, and to the present. On the contrary, in the following section I trace some of the conflicts and contested experiences of home as a location in which the realities of race and class relations intersect

with gender. The home and the domestic sphere are a location that can usefully be conceived of as a space of intersection: one that resists simplification and, crucially, destabilises claims to universal experiences of womanhood and motherhood. In the essay, 'Homeplace', bell hooks argues that "attempts to critically assess the role of black women in liberation struggle must examine the way political concern about the impact of racism shaped black women's thinking, their sense of home and their modes of parenting" (hooks 1990:46).

In a similar vein, Collins argues that feminist critiques of motherhood and the family from the 1970s and 1980s overwhelmingly reflected white, middle-class women's experiences and typically lacked an adequate race and class perspective (2000:188). On the question of motherhood, specifically the experiences and construction of black motherhood that have so often been absent from feminist discourse, Collins is critical of what she terms the controlling image of the "superstrong Black mother" that "praises Black women's resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers" (2000:188). Her point being that to "remain on their pedestal, these same superstrong Black mothers must continue to place their needs behind everyone else, especially their sons" (2000:188). hooks is also clear that that the tradition of 'black mother worship' though positively motivated, "extols the virtues of self-sacrifice while simultaneously implying that such a gesture is not reflective of choice and will, rather the perfect embodiment of a woman's 'natural' role" (1990:45).

Speaking directly to the prevalent discourse within second-wave (white) feminism that identified the family as the source of women's oppression, Hazel Carby argues that "we need to recognize that during slavery, period of colonialism and under the present authoritarian state, the black family has been a site of political and cultural resistance to racism" (1982:112). Her point is that for some women (and also men and children) the home operated historically as (and continues to offer the possibility to be) an important site of resistance to institutional and structural racism and white supremacy.

Drawing similar conclusions to Carby, hooks also argues that, within the context of the historical experiences of African-American women, "homeplace" (1990:41-51) is a site of resistance to dominating and exploitative

social structures. She writes that “Historically, African-American people believe that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension” (1990:42). Furthermore, hooks argues that “black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied [to] us on the outside in the public world” (1990:42). In this way, homeplace is conceived of as existing beyond the idea of home as a property. Instead, homeplace is both a space in which to retreat to and recover in and is also a place of labour, specifically a space of resistant reproduction that teaches “dignity [and] integrity of being” (1990:41). hooks is clear that the tasks and labours undertaken by black women in making homeplace cannot be reduced simply to a matter of black women providing service, on the contrary, “it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination” (1990:42).

The construction of homeplace as a site of resistance differs from the home as a place of paid work. It is useful to circle back briefly to the notion of service, specifically the histories of certain women (working-class, women of colour and migrants) providing domestic services as paid workers (domestic worker, cleaners, nannies and elder care workers) in other people’s homes. hooks speaks of the “tension between service outside one’s home, family and kin network, service provided to white folks which took time and energy, and the effort of black women to conserve enough of themselves to provide service (care and nurturance) within their own families and communities” (1990:42). The experience of home as a site of paid work, experiences that overwhelmingly occur in other people’s homes, opens up another line of resistance in relation to the home. As discussed in Chapter Six, the labour struggles that transformed ‘service’ in Britain from women’s employment that had historically been a live-in job to one that was part-time and live out, can be read as women’s resistance to the conditions of isolation and exploitation of paid domestic work. It is the construction of the home as belonging to the private sphere and, therefore, what goes on inside as somewhat concealed or

out of view, that produces a specific mode of exploitation for those who labour within it.

The task of making homeplace is one that hooks posits as fragile and subject to violation and destruction, “for when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance” (1990:47). The necessity of a political valuation of homeplace for resistance struggles is articulated by Iris Marion Young as “the ability to resist dominant social structures requires a space beyond the full reach of those structures, where different, more humane social relations can be lived and imagined” (Young 1997:159). However, hooks also highlights contemporary efforts to change the subversive homeplace into a site of patriarchal domination of black women by black men and argues “this shift in perspective, where homeplace is not viewed as a political site, has had a negative impact on the construction of black female identity and political consciousness” (1990:47). hooks calls for a political recommitment to a radical conceptualisation of home, “drawing on past legacies, contemporary black women can begin to reconceptualize ideas of homeplace, once again considering the primacy of domesticity as a site of subversion and resistance” (1990:48).

However, the question of home, as well as that of family and motherhood remain contested concepts and values within various tendencies of feminist thought and certainly disagreement exists among Black and post-colonial feminists as to how we can, and should, orientate towards home. Iris Marion Young highlights that, for feminism “house and home are deeply ambivalent values” (1997:134) and draws attention to the various feminist ambivalences concerning the values accorded to notions of home and the domestic. Revisiting both Martin Heidegger (1971) and Luce Irigaray (1992), discussions of equating dwelling with the way of being human and the division of dwelling into moments of building and preservation, Young (1997:135) draws attention to Irigaray’s assertion that man can build and dwell in the world in patriarchal culture, only on the basis of the materiality and nurturance of women. In other words, the possibility of production and accumulation of wealth relies on, and is dependent on, the gendered work of reproduction in the domestic sphere. Young seeks to re-centre preservation within her analysis of home, arguing that ‘preservation makes and remakes home as

support for personal identity without accumulation, certainty or fixity' (1997:135).

It is through a revaluation of preservation that Young critiques Simone de Beauvoir's overwhelmingly negative valuation of the activity of giving meaning to and maintaining home, vividly recounted by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1997). De Beauvoir writes, "Women's work within the home gives her no autonomy; it is not directly useful to society, it does not open out on the future, it produces nothing" (1997:475). Specifically, on the question of domestic work, she writes: "Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present" (1997:470).

In her critique of de Beauvoir, Young posits the values of homemaking that underlie the affirmation of personal and cultural identity as counter to the various feminist interventions by Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty (1986), Teresa de Lauretis (1990) and Bonnie Honig (1994) that reject home as inappropriately totalizing and imperialist. While agreeing with much of their critique of home as depoliticising, essentialist and exploitative and their suggestion that we should fear the nostalgic seductions of home as a fantasy of wholeness and certainty, Young draws on hooks' positive meaning of 'home' as a critical value for feminism.

In so far as it is useful to assert that there are many multiple experiences and, at times, contradictory meanings of home, it is also crucial to not be seduced by notions of the home as a space that is inherently good, stable or natural. The conceptualisation of home as a radical site of resistance is not inherent, instead it is a political orientation that seeks to revalue and reconfigure the home as site of counter-power and one that must confront the construction and maintenance of patriarchal masculinity. In locating and making visible home as a potential and lived place of resistance, it is also necessary to remain attentive to experiences of home as a place of exploitative waged and unwaged work and sensitive to the experiences of many people, many of them women for whom the home is a space marked by violence, isolation and unhappiness. Indeed the task is to unravel the location of the home, so as to

make clear the social structures that perpetuate it as a site of domination. The challenge in confronting the home and reproduction as a problematic is to make sense of the various structures, histories and processes that have produced the traditional nuclear family as the normative family structure.

Furthermore, it is the theoretical and political question of making visible the dependencies, separations and labours of the multiple and, at times, conflicting histories: of working-class women who were often both workers and mothers, with that of middle-class women many of who were historically 'just housewives' but are now, overwhelmingly, working mothers and the stories of women of colour who have been excluded from discourses of motherhood and have traditionally always worked, as slaves, bonded labourers and now overwhelmingly in badly-paid and low-status job. Slavery and colonialism made possible the reduction of the costs of reproducing labour-power in the industrial metropolis, the benefits of which were shared unequally, between capitalists and (white) workers. Thus for the wage that capital pays the industrial worker, it also purchased the unwaged labour of the slave. There is a similar dynamic to the historical organisation of women's domestic labour, where capital harnessed the labour of the man and his wife for the cost of male wages. In the contemporary organisation of reproduction, in which waged and commodified reproductive labour has dramatically increased, there is, again, a similar dynamic, one that connects to the mostly waged, indeed low-waged, reproductive work performed by migrants. If migrant wages for reproductive work were not so low, many 'middle-class' families, whose wages have, in fact, stagnated since the 1970s would not be able to employ them to clean their homes or look after their children or elder relatives.

## Chapter Nine

### Seizing The Means of Reproduction

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#### 9.1 Breeding, Part Two: Encounter #8

Standing there in the bright morning sunshine of Sydney the word breeder stung in part because my 19 year-old self didn't dream of having children. By the time I reached the age of 19 I had discovered feminism and it enabled me to imagine being a woman that did not include breeding. I swapped babies for a wage of one's own. At the time, I wanted to be sterilised. It wasn't that I didn't want to have children; it was so I could be set free from the potential – that very gendered assumption that one day I would, of course, want to have kids. I even went to see a doctor about it. He suggested I see a shrink. I laughed in his face and carried on working hard and earning nothing.

But it turns out that Natasha was right, I was a breeder. Around a year and half after my first child was born, I had what can only be described as a crisis of motherhood. I was not suffering from post-natal depression nor was I exclusively at home with the baby. I was one of the so-called 'lucky' mothers whose partner did more than just 'help'; he washed, cared, cleaned, cooked and worried with me about that high temperature or strange looking vomit. Considering the unevenness of pregnancy and breastfeeding, we talked, as much as sleep deprivation would allow, about wanting to find new ways of being parents that were more interesting than trying to be equal or our roles being the same. But my problem wasn't the baby, or breastfeeding, or not getting enough sleep. All those things were

certainly hard. But, as I lay sobbing, panic ripping through my body, it was motherhood, my newly acquired identity that came spilling out as the problem. Good mother, bad mother, good-enough mother, working mother, stay-at-home mother all and none of them made me want to scream.

It wasn't that I couldn't find a version of motherhood to fit my lifestyle or a bundle of commodities to consume to affirm my status. It was more profound than that, it was an unnerving realisation of having birthed capital: all that blood and dirt. And that the work of wiping the snotty noses, cleaning up the shit and teaching them to be on time, it all still pretty much fell to women and yet more women, no matter how you rolled the dice. Added to that enormity was the fact that, while my nice radical reconfiguration of family was a much needed little refuge within the horror show, it was not a way out.

## **9.2 Knots**

The impetus for this thesis began with a crisis: my own crisis of motherhood. It was a crisis that bubbled away for a number of years, occasionally threatening to reach breaking point, though ultimately it provided me with the energy and urgency to try and understand not only how motherhood has come to be constructed in the way that it is, but also to try and grasp the strategic function of reproduction within neoliberalism. Holding onto the feminist idea that the personal is political, I dived into archival and ethnographic research, engaged with feminist political campaigns about childcare and domestic work (and started a few of my own), got taught a few lessons on the steep learning curve that is the daily life of bringing up children — all in an effort to try and unravel what intuitively felt like a series of knots. In many ways this research has been about trying to untangle that series of knots: some of which are frighteningly old, and others that appear to be freshly tied and relatively new in their tension. Investigating some of the old, as well as the new knots of reproduction, reveals motherhood to be held



together as much by race and class as it is by gender. The task of trying to unravel motherhood and the political economy of reproduction is one that necessitates analysing how the threads of gender and that of race are interwoven and intersect with that of class, bound up and pulled tight to produce a formation that operates strategically and, at the same time, conceals and obscures much of the value of reproduction that occurs under capitalism.

One of the central concerns of this research has been the labour of reproduction, in that I have repeatedly returned to, and placed an emphasis on, the doing of reproduction and the meaning created through relation. In pursuing the argument that motherhood is a contingent outcome of capitalist development and as the direct result of government intervention, I have also stressed that it is a subjectivity that has changed and also one that is constantly being contested. In addition to outlining the instability and unevenness of motherhood has been my desire to move away from naturalised conceptions of reproduction: one is not born a mother, anymore than one is born a woman<sup>46</sup>. From this perspective, giving birth to a child does not necessarily mean that you are a mother and, conversely, many women who have never given birth occupy and experience the subjectivity of motherhood.

The restructuring of reproduction, mothering and the domestic home that occurred with the emergence of capitalism in Britain, suggests that one of the central functions of motherhood under capitalism is the maintenance of the separation of production and reproduction that characterises capitalist social relations and processes of accumulation. This separation of production and reproduction can be mapped — in uneven and incomplete ways — onto other separations such as productive labour from reproductive labour, the private from the public sphere and that of home from work: separations that have all had to be produced, enforced and maintained in the long history of capitalist development.

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<sup>46</sup> "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" - Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1997[1949])

The Marxist feminist perspective of capitalism as series of interlocking and contingent separations, many of them enforced through violence and extra-economic means also encapsulates the production of value and, conversely, the devaluation of certain spheres, labours and subjectivities. The devaluation of the labour of reproduction has operated in such a way that both naturalises and erases reproductive work from the calculus of value. In this instance, one knot of motherhood is usefully understood as a contradiction: the reproduction of labour-power is, indeed, central and necessary for capitalist growth, development and profitability yet it has been devalued, constructed as secondary to the production of other commodities and consigned to the realm of nature and the biological.

For decades now, feminist theory has argued that the specific way capitalism attempts to organise the reproduction of labour-power is not only necessary for the functioning of capitalism but is also proved extremely profitable. As a result of the devaluation of reproduction, there is a temptation to think that capitalism 'doesn't care' about the home, the family and unwaged reproductive work. However, the continued centrality of labour-power to circuits of accumulation suggests otherwise. Future research is needed to explore how the organisation of reproduction of labour-power as externalised operates in such a way as to produce unwaged reproductive labour as an internalised outside within capitalist production.

The organisation of reproduction via interlocking relations of separation, devaluation and naturalisation are practices and processes that are usefully conceived of as historical and contingent, which is also to stress that the technologies of reproduction have worked differently in different periods of capitalist development and that how these mechanisms are maintained and produced has not only been contingent but also contested. For every happy housewife, there have also been those of us who are dissatisfied and distressed by the boundaries and limits of the reproductive sphere. Another knot is that a critical feminist politics of reproduction needs to be able to revalue and make visible the labour of reproduction without recourse to a politics that is nostalgic for the past or romantic about the non-commodified labour of domestic work that has dominated many women's lives up until very recently.

The subjectivity of being a full-time housewife and the cult of motherhood that organised many (though certainly not all) women's lives in post-war Britain was only made possible by the creation of the welfare state and the extension of a sufficient family wage to working-class households who previously could not have afforded such gender contracts. Within post-war motherhood, two different and historical female subjectivities were brought together: that of the 'non-working' middle-class housewife and that of the working-class domestic servant. For many British middle-class women this reorganisation of reproductive labour represented a "proletarianisation of women" (Wilson, 1977) in that women's lived experiences of the domestic sphere became less demarcated than in previous periods. Feminist scholars argue that the possibility of recognising common interests based on questions of gender emerged for some women as the relations of class difference in the domestic sphere (mistresses and maids) became reconfigured after the war (Phillips (1987).

In so far as it is possible to argue that the knots of post-war motherhood were tied to a gender contract that was produced through the creation of the welfare state and extension of the family wage, it is also crucial to recognise that the economic, social and political transformations of the post-war years relied on wealth created from the labour of migrant workers from the former colonies. As such the possibility of post-war motherhood relied upon the exploitation and discrimination of racialised labour. In this research I have highlighted and analysed the interrelations of the various "denied dependencies" (Plumwood 2003) that have been central to the functioning of British capitalism: the unwaged reproductive work of women and the exploitation of racialised labour both in the post-war years and during the Transatlantic slave trade.

This line of argument connects to the considerable feminist and sociological literature concerning the labour and conditions of domestic workers in the globalised neoliberal economy. My contribution to this literature has been to place waged domestic work in dialogue with the continued necessity and experiences of unwaged reproductive labour and to critically think about the home as space of work, resistance and struggle. Furthermore, by focusing on the waged reproductive work of childcare in both workers' homes

(childminders) and private nurseries, my analysis argues that it is not the actual activity but the social relations in which such activity occurs that determines both whether something is work and the conditions of labour. In the instances that reproductive labour is commodified but remains within the home, workers (nannies, cleaners and domestic workers and elder care workers) often experience poor working conditions, lower wages and insufficient employment safeguards (Romero 2002, Parrenas 2001, Lutz 2011) and, in some instances, the level of exploitation and abuse is considerable. In particular, the intersection of labour and migration, specifically insecure or precarious immigration status that is often attached to the employee's job or even to a particular employer heightens the uneven power relations that exist in waged domestic work (Anderson 2000). In this instance the home as a workplace remains coded as private, lacking in co-workers, lacking in visibility and is often a space of isolation and, at times, violence.

The similarities between the experiences of migrant domestic workers, who clean, care and cook in other people's homes and women's experiences in the 1970s with the institution of the family and the unwaged domestic work of the housewife are striking. Both articulate a position of vulnerability that emerges from an uneven distribution of power, lack of visibility and devaluation of their work. What is interesting to note is that the transformation of the work into waged work, from the unwaged domestic work performed by housewives to waged domestic work performed by cleaners, nannies and domestics, does not necessarily transform the uneven power relations or exploitation. One reason is that the workplace remains contained in the individualised and isolated space of the home. In this way the geography of the home orders reproductive labour even when it is waged, in that the home operates as the ordering infrastructure of reproduction.

The discourses of choice and equality, mobilised by mainstream feminism as well as neoliberal politics of reproduction have reconfigured the subjectivity of motherhood and reorganised the labour of reproduction. This thesis has also focused on the considerable transformations in feminist politics from previous articulations of women's reproductive rights that were expressed in the demands of the women's liberation movement for free 24-hour nurseries to contemporary feminist discourse that places an emphasis on creating more

reproductive choices for women. The interrelation between feminism and neoliberalism, described as a “double entanglement” (McRobbie 2009) appears as another knot, in which the ascendant political regime of neoliberalism is able to both do and undo feminist ideals. One place in which this knot appears to have been pulled particularly tightly is in relation female employment and, specifically, maternal employment. Silvia Federici writes: “Feminism has become equated with gaining equal opportunity in the labor market, from the factory to the corporate room, gaining equal status with men, and transforming our lives and personalities to fit our new productive task” (2012:56). She notes that few feminists in the women’s movement in the 1970s questioned the discourse of ‘leaving home’ and ‘going to work’ as a precondition for women’s liberation. “For the liberals the job was coated in the glamour of the career, for the socialists it meant that women would ‘join the class struggle’ (Federici, 2012: 56).

As women's participation in the waged labour market has steadily increased over the last 40 years, the politics of reproduction has shifted to a discourse in which motherhood is increasingly constructed as a choice. Within the neoliberal discourse of motherhood, not only is the decision to have a child a private matter for which individuals bear the costs but, in addition, there is also a neoliberal compulsion to constantly calculate the costs and benefits of one’s choices as well as identify the risks associated with certain behaviours, options and desires. I have argued that as a result of motherhood being constructed more and more as something that is chosen, the spaces of resistance and opposition towards motherhood have been limited and, in many ways, individuated. Furthermore, moments of resistance towards neoliberal motherhood have been privatised and also structured and limited by the dismantling of the welfare state and the privatisation of public provision of social reproduction. The processes and practices of neoliberal reform and restructuring can be argued to have reconfigured the responsibility, cost and risks associated with social reproduction away from the state and towards the individualised family. In this way, it is possible to read commodification as a site of resistance to the partial re-privatisation of reproductive labour.

Commodification as resistance appears as yet another knot of reproduction and one that presents considerable contradictions for developing a critical feminist politics of reproduction. From one perspective commodification of reproduction is a method of rejecting the notion that it should be the family, and, by extension, women who should absorb the extra work produced by the restructuring of the welfare state. In contrast to the 1970s, subjects under neoliberalism seek out individual solutions and as such, the matrix of choice becomes limited to those available through either the market or the family. This might be one reason why the question of reproduction and, specifically, the unwaged domestic labour of reproduction have not featured that prominently in contemporary feminist politics. Commodified reproductive solutions, extending far beyond the question of whether or not to get a cleaner have become increasingly necessary as the state reorganises the public provision of reproductive labour and, crucially, as dual income households become the norm. However, the strategy of commodification relies on not only exploitative labour relations and income disparity, but it increases the hierarchies of race and class differences between women.

In addition to exploring the internalised outside of unwaged reproduction, it would be useful for future research to extend the analysis of motherhood, home and the family developed in this thesis to that of the socially reproductive labour that occurs in communities and in neighbourhoods. In tracing the various labour processes that extend and connect the family and domestic home to wider networks and institutions, such research would contribute to further exploring how processes of financialisation and commodification have restructured community resources and reconfigured expectations of the nation-state. In this way the neoliberal transformations to social reproduction in areas such as health and education could be considered alongside the changes that have occurred to the family and the reproduction of labour-power.

This research began as a crisis that then evolved into an investigation of how the processes and practices of making and remaking people and workers in Britain have been transformed not only by the ascendant political rationality of neoliberalism, but also by women's struggles that reconfigured gender, class and race relations. Through exploring both the 1970s feminist demand

for free 24-hour nurseries and the contemporary provision of extended, overnight and flexible childcare in Britain this thesis contributes to feminist understandings of the gendered and racialised class dynamics inside and outside the home and the wage. This repositions the 'Women Question' as yet again the unavoidable, necessary and primary concern for comprehending and intervening in the brutalising consequences of capitalist accumulation.

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